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ABSTRACT

The collection of essays on classroom research for second language teachers includes: "Teachers as Researchers in the Language Classroom: An Overview" (Anthony J. Liddicoat, Louise M. Jansen); "A Visit to the Art Gallery: An Oral Exercise in a Second Language" (Meri Dragicevic); "Encouraging Class Cohesiveness in the LOTE Classroom" (Corine Cordes); "Can Card Games Promote the Sustained Use of LOTE Between Students?" (Therese Dupe); "Evaluating Information Gap Activities for Profiling Oral Interaction Skills" (Fiona Arthur); "What Factors Have Inhibited Second Language Development for an 'Unsuccessful' Language Student?" (Barbara Cairns); "Second Language Acquisition and Its Implications for Teaching: Teaching Word Order in Indonesian" (Melissa Gould); "Students' Approaches to Reading Comprehension" (Mary Nicolson); "Reading Activities in Early Childhood Classes" (Melanie Hobbs); "Introducing a Reading Strategy to ESL Students" (Lorna Fleetwood); and "Teaching Students to Communicate: An Examination of the Discourse Forms Modelled in Current Texts" (Livia Tigwell). (MSE)

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LIFTING PRACTICE

Teachers as researchers in the language classroom

Louise M. Jansen
Anthony J. Liddicoat
Editors

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Teachers as researchers in the language classroom

Louise M. Jansen
Anthony J. Liddicoat
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Teachers as researchers in the language classroom: An overview

Anthony J. Liddicoat and Louise M. Jansen

Introduction

Research by teachers is becoming an increasingly important part of the landscape in school education in Australia, as in other parts of the world. Initiatives such as Language Australia's Child ESL and Literacy Research Network have promoted language teachers' research and have begun to disseminate the results. Also tertiary institutions are increasingly including a research component as a part of their professional development programs for language teachers. This has been the case with the Australian National University's Language Inservice For Teachers (LIFT) program[1] from its inception. In establishing the LIFT program, a central belief was that a professional development program should help language teachers to develop the skills needed to conduct applied research projects. It was felt that such skills were important for professional development because applied research projects assist the teachers to understand their own practices, students and classroom environments in more depth and also give teachers the experience of undertaking systematic research on issues relevant to their work.

In this volume, we wish to present an overview of the philosophy which underlies the inclusion of research as a central part of an in-service professional development program for language teachers, and give examples of the scope and potential for research conducted by teachers. Each of the papers in this volume shows language teachers applying research techniques to develop a better understanding of everyday issues that they face in the classroom.

Teachers as researchers

Language classrooms and language teachers have been studied extensively and for a long time and there is now a considerable body of literature about the teaching profession (see for example, Seliger and Long 1983, Chaudron 1988). However, as Stenhouse argues:

> It is not enough that teachers' work should be studied: they need to study it themselves.
>
> (Stenhouse 1975:143)

The teacher as researcher brings a unique and vital perspective to classroom research which is important in developing a good understanding of practice.

Classroom research is not simply a process of theorising about classrooms, essentially, it is connected to problem solving. Researchers identify an issue that needs to be better understood or improved and then set out to do this in a principled, and systematic way.

When research is viewed as problem solving, its connection to teaching practice and the professional work of teachers becomes clearer. Every teacher needs to make decisions about what s/he is doing in the classroom. Classrooms are real, varied and have complex issues that need to be addressed. Teachers are confronted with new materials, curriculum statements, and a host of other information that they have to interpret and apply. In addition, teachers have to evaluate whether or nor what they are doing is successful. In all of these activities, we can see the bases for research.

The sort of research we are arguing for here is applied research: research which seeks to apply knowledge to solve problems and/or improve outcomes in real situations. The teacher as researcher is involved in developing knowledge about her/his practice and relating knowledge to practice in systematic ways. Walker argues that applied research in education should

> be interactive with experience and practice, seeking to extend the scope and application of innovation, to increase efficiency, and to concentrate its attention on the relation between design and performance.
>
> (Walker 1985:183)

With Beasley and Riordan (1981), we would argue that the sorts of research most appropriate for teachers should be:

- a consciousness raising exercise which increases awareness of classroom events;

- a way of providing teachers with better information about what actually happens in their classrooms;
- a way to communicate issues in teaching and learning to their colleagues and to others; and
- a bridge between theory and practice through which teachers can critically evaluate the usefulness of theoretical research for their own practice.

In particular, we would argue that teachers' research needs to be focused closely on what teachers do in their work. It should be an integrated part of their professional practice, not an additional burden. It should set itself realistic goals given the other demands on teachers' time and as such is inevitably small in its scope. However, small scale research projects should never be viewed as insignificant research. Small scale applied research projects are important for two reasons. Firstly, they allow teachers to understand their own practice and to evaluate changes in their practice and secondly, they have the potential to give insights which can reshape the ways in which we view classrooms (Allwright 1995).

We are not proposing applied research as an alternative to more conventional approaches to research. In fact, both applied and conventional research are dependent on each other (Walker 1985). In the area of Applied Linguistics, the teacher as a professional involved in the implementation of theory derived from conventional research is in a position to see and understand things which are not available to university academics, or which do not fit in with the types of questions which are valued by more academic approaches to research. The knowledge gained by teachers as researchers can in turn inform the sorts of questions which academic researchers ask and can help to refine and redirect theory. Teachers' research represents one step in overcoming the barrier between the academic applied linguist and the practising language teacher (Kramsch 1995).

We do not, however, wish to make applied research sound too grandiose – something for the especially dedicated teacher. We believe that research is central to the practice of teaching. As the teaching profession is influenced more and more by policy directions that involve the application of new curriculum documents in the classroom, teachers are being called on more and more to become researchers. The application of a curriculum framework or competencies to the classroom involves sophisticated approaches to problem solving. As a result, systematic classroom research is becoming increasingly a part of the teacher's job, not simply an additional

exercise for the enthusiastic. Most importantly, language classrooms are unique environments in which curriculum, pedagogy and linguistic theory have to be applied. As a result of this uniqueness, any proposal for change in practice needs to be tested and adapted by the individual teacher in the individual classroom (Stenhouse 1975). Teachers' research is therefore a part of their professional practice and a vehicle for their professional development.

Teachers' research as professional development

Recently, the traditional model of in-service professional development has come under a great deal of criticism (Campbell 1997). It has been argued that one-off professional development activities, often in isolation from existing practise in the classroom, have little impact on teaching itself (Cram 1985). What is needed in professional development is something which enhances on-going growth in skills and knowledge (Connors 1991). Professional development, like any other educational enterprise is not an inoculation of knowledge, but rather should be preparing teachers for their professional lives. Scriven (1991:26) has argued that there is a need for teachers to be "regularly, if not continually involved in a quality program of self-development".

This has a number of implications. Firstly, professional development needs to have a dimension which allows teachers to continually up-grade and monitor aspects of their teaching where they themselves perceive a need. Teachers are themselves professionals and have insights into their own practice. Secondly, professional development needs to allow for the possibility of continual involvement in professional growth. Thirdly, continual involvement in professional development neither can nor should depend solely on outside provision. It needs to be generated also by the individual teacher in response to her/his individual classroom needs.

We believe that, as a part of an overall professional development package, experience in conducting small scale, classroom based research is an important response to these implications. Teachers who have acquired skills in classroom based research have acquired the capacity to undertake self-guided professional development throughout their teaching careers. They have what Stenhouse (1975:144) calls "a capacity for autonomous professional self-development through systematic self-study". Teachers' research as such is not an additional component added on to teaching, but is

a part of the whole experience of teaching. Research projects of the type presented in this book are examples of structured problem-solving in the classroom and this capacity for structured problem-solving is at the basis of the value of research in an overall program of professional development.

It is also a central tenet of successful professional development that it requires the active involvement of the participants (Cram 1985), and this involvement should not just occur during the professional development activity itself. By implementing and reflecting on new knowledge through small scale research focused directly on practice in the classroom, teachers are involved actively in professional development, not only in general terms, but in the specifics of the application of their professional development in their own classroom.

Sellars argues that:

> A growth point in the PD of teachers is when they begin to see their teaching as a form of intellectual endeavour worthy of researching and sharing.
>
> (Sellars 1996:21)

The teacher as researcher is actively involved in this endeavour, and moreover, is the owner and controller of the research. The research grows from the needs of the teacher, not from outside research agendas and interests. Furthermore, this research raises the profile of teaching as an analytical and reflective practice which can be shared with other teachers through writing, as in this volume, or through workshops, presentations or even informal discussion. The teacher as researcher therefore has the potential not only to contribute to her or his own professional development, but also to provide sources of knowledge for other teachers.

About this volume

The papers included in this volume were chosen from among the projects carried out by participants in the LIFT program and cover a range of issues and employ a range of methodologies. They exemplify the ways in which language teachers can explore their own practice and their teaching situation.

Meri Dragicevic describes and evaluates in her paper a field trip which she undertook to increase students' opportunities for oral practice in Italian. The project, which evolved in three phases (pre-trip, trip and post-trip) and involved a total of fifteen action steps led students to viewing and commenting in Italian on a painting exhibition of European Masterpieces.

While the project involved the entire class, 6 students were targetted specifically for data collection on the outcomes of the experimental trip. The data included student diaries, student homework, teacher observation, tape recordings of students' comments at the exhibition and a final student questionnaire. The study emphasizes the need for student participation in decision making, careful planning, and a willingness, on the part of the teacher, to invest a great deal of time and a preparedness for risk taking.

A striking element in this exciting study is the teacher's special relationship to her students: she presumes, expresses and achieves a sense of mutual trust, effort, and responsibility. In choosing between an Italian restaurant or the Art Gallery for example Dragicevic consults her students, the resulting option for the Gallery thus is a joint decision. The teacher and the students also strike a pact, as it were: if the students undertake to do their best at actually speaking Italian, the teacher will invest the special time and effort required to prepare the students and to organize it all. Both parties come good on their promises: the teacher in skilfully preparing her students and in carefully organizing the trip, the students in taking their assignments seriously and making a concerted effort to express themselves in Italian while at the Gallery. As a result, as the data analyses show, both teacher and students exceed their own expectations and so reap the fruit of mutual trust and joint effort. An exemplary field trip indeed!

Thérèse Dupé carried out an experimental study in which she used card games to investigate whether or not primary level students of Italian were capable of using the language in a spontaneous or autonomous way. The study was motivated by Dupé's observation that students tend to depend too much on props and often are not encouraged or inclined to take any risks in the language. Dupé chose card games because she saw these as an inherently social activity with which her students had some familiarity and which required a large amount of "pre-fabricated" speech which students could not only use with confidence, but also break out of. Dupé collected several forms of data, including audio and video tapes of students playing the games, journalled teacher observations and student notes. Data analysis showed, among other things, that if students are too familiar with an activity, it can become counter-productive. Dupé found that games containing sufficiently new elements and other properties that capture students' sustained interest, such as a competitive element, were successful in achieving both autonomous and creative use of the language. Dupé also found that students lacked the linguistic means necessary for sustained oral interaction.

A valuable aspect in Dupé's study lies in her marrying elements of a sociolinguistic nature with those of a psycholinguistic nature. Dupé not only looks carefully at language use in a social context but also at language structure in a learning context. She interconnects these two elements so that the former becomes the driving force behind the latter. In addition, she observes students' first steps in moving beyond a learning plateau: students do not only use learned chunks of the language in autonomous meaningful ways, but they also start breaking out of these moulds and become creative, examples include the use of the word *basta* to denote the end of a game, and abbreviating the expression "I would like to bet blue" or "I would like to bet red" to "blue" or "red". While Dupé analyses such instances of repetition and simplification – quite correctly – as socially appropriate uses of the language in a pragmatic sense, she also recognizes them as creative language use and hence as evidence for language learning development.

Corine Cordes reports on an applied research project which involved her Continuing Year 11 French class and in which she focused specifically on the behaviour of three individual students. The goals of the project were to increase class cohesiveness, as the students came from different feeder schools, and to change disruptive chitchatting among the targetted three, befriended students, who had came from the same feeder school. The project involved two action steps: random pairing/grouping and a joint theatre performance. Cordes journaled her observations of the effects of her interventions in group formation and videotaped students in pairs completing questionnaires and discussing their reactions to the play. In her paper Cordes describes the two steps in detail and analyses the results. These indicate that random pairing/grouping was a useful strategy to see students break out of existing groupings and create new social groups. Cordes considers this an important step towards the greater class cohesiveness which ultimately was achieved by the students preparing a theatre performance together.

Cordes' project illustrates how a relatively simple experimental strategy when employed with purpose and monitored with care can achieve far reaching results in a number of ways. For example, the strategy of random pairing was initially motivated by the teacher's focus on three students but it appeared to benefit the entire class. It also became an important stepping stone to a further experimental intervention, the conversion of a series of paired performances into a joint play. Given the positive results of both, Cordes indicates she intends to apply both strategies again, not only in her French classes, but also in her composite Indonesian class to achieve a greater sense of tolerance and cohesiveness in that group.

Fiona Arthur reports on a study she undertook to examine the suitability of two information gap tasks to elicit language at level three in the Oral Interaction strand of the Languages Profile for Australian Schools (Australian Education Foundation 1994). The study evolved in the context of a project which involved collecting work samples and drawing up guidelines for assessment. The data included video samples of students of Italian performing information gap tasks and an interview with an Italian teacher on her perceptions of the suitability of information gap tasks. The video samples were transcribed and Arthur, together with a fellow teacher, assessed the language level in accordance with the LOTE Profile and the Draft Guidelines of a National Professional Development Program (NPDP) project. All samples were found to be effective in eliciting level 3 oral interaction. An issue arising from the teacher interview was that level 3 students still have very little language to sustain oral interaction. Arthur recommends that appropriate strategies be explicitly taught.

While all samples did indeed produce level 3 oral interaction there were also incidences of level 2 and 4. Both incidences lead Arthur to make significant qualifications in her conclusions. The incidence of level 2 performance was revealed through the video recording, which showed one student being able only to produce a question with the written support of his prompt sheet. The incidence of level 4 was actually caused by an error in the props, which supplied the interacting students with conflicting, rather than complementary information. In trying to sort out the problem, in Italian, the students needed and in fact did interact at level 4. These findings lead Arthur to stress that in order to elicit interaction at level 3 (rather than 2) information gap tasks need to be unrehearsed and carried out without prompt notes. In order to give students an opportunity to perform at level 4 she recommends that in setting the task teachers consider incorporating - intentionally - a problem which requires spontaneous oral interaction if it is to be resolved.

In her case study of an "unsuccessful" language student, Barbara Cairns focuses in depth on one, problematic Year 11 Continuing French student who appears to have made no progress over the entire first semester. In accordance with her ethnographic methodology Cairns collected a wide variety of data ranging from published research on second language acquisition, a student questionnaire, the student's assignments and tests, as well as Cairns' observations during teaching. Cairns also conducted a range of interviews: with the student in question, with other students, with fellow teachers of other subjects, and with a parent. During second semester, ie. over the course of the study, there is some improvement in the student's learning.

Through an in-depth analysis of her data Cairns identifies a number of interacting factors which account for the student's initial difficulties and the observed subsequent improvement. These lead to suggestions for achieving further improvement in the student's continued studies.

An interesting development over the course of the study is that although the student is only observed and receives no "special" treatment her language learning nevertheless starts developing. As a result the original research question which sought to explain why the development was inhibited (as was observed over the first semester) needed to be augmented to hypothesise which factors accounted for the subsequent development. As Cairns concludes, one factor might be the "special" attention the student knew she received as the single subject of a study (she was aware of her special role as she was asked for permission beforehand and also was interviewed several times). However, according to Cairns' analysis other factors equally play a role. An interesting twist in the study is that in the end it is less the inhibiting factors but rather those that were seen to promote the student's learning (as occurred while the study was under way) that provide clues for improving the student's future learning development.

In her paper Melissa Gould reports on an experimental study she undertook to evaluate the effectiveness of her teaching of Indonesian word order to a class of Year eight students of Indonesian. The students previously had been exposed to but had not been formally taught Indonesian word order and a written pretest showed that they had not acquired the specific rule that was to be taught in the experiment. Gould used a variety of different methodologies to teach the rule. After intensive instruction, which included ample form-focus and written as well as oral practice, Gould post-tested her students. While the written test showed that her teaching had indeed borne fruit an oral test confirmed her informal observation that the students despite the intensive instruction and practice were not able to use the rule in spontaneous speech. Gould applies Pienemann's hypotheses about limitations in learnability and teachability to explain her findings and discusses implications of the results of her study for future syllabus design.

Gould's study is an exciting example of how teachers can apply findings of researchers in new settings and thus become more than researchers on teaching practice; their projects becomecontributions to basic research in their own right. Gould applies the principle of acquisition stages as researched for other languages, such as English, German and Japanese to the acquisition of Indonesian, a language, for which research has not yet established acquisition stages. Through her experiment Gould discovers that

there is an Indonesian word order rule which is not "teachable" (in the sense of Pienemann's Teachability Hypothesis) to students of a certain level. As the Teachability Hypothesis is based on acquisition stages and since Gould's results indicate systematic unteachability/unlearnability of the rule at a certain level, Gould in all likelihood has discovered a stage in the acquisition of Indonesian word order which is relatively high-up in the hierarchy of complexity and therefore not teachable to learners who have not acquired all of the lower level word order rules of Indonesian (which research has yet to establish).

Mary Nicolson's study describes two lessons she developed and taught to enhance students' reading strategies. The first lesson started out with a student questionnaire which had the dual purpose of making the teacher and the students themselves aware of strengths and weaknesses in the reading habits the students has developed so far. Apart from the student questionnaire all further work was done in groups. Strategies taught included top down as well as bottom up strategies and ranged from brainstorming facts about the topic beforehand, categorizing these in semantic maps, identifying cognates, and identifying "stumbling blocks" as well as the strategies used in overcoming these. A transfer of the acquired skills to other tasks and contexts was observed in two follow-up activities.

A key feature to the success of the project is no doubt the teacher's focus on raising and developing students' *awareness* of their knowledge, strategies and progress. This starts with the student questionnaire on reading habits, at the beginning of the first lesson. It is followed by students brainstorming of facts they already know about the French revolution. It continues in their creating semantic maps before and after reading and in their having to explicate strategies they used to overcome "stumbling blocks". No doubt the positive results observed in the follow-up activities were a consequence not merely of the fact that students had been taught the reading strategies, but, probably even more so, of the fact that students had developed an awareness of the usefulness of these strategies in enabling them to read the texts with greater gain.

Melanie Hobbs takes insights gained from studying research in a second language reading back to a first language, prereading environment. In her paper she reports on a pre-literary unit she designed and taught to develop her pre-schoolers' grasp of *genre* to give them a head start in their future literary development. As her pre-schoolers were already familiar with the narrative genre, the "story book", she focussed on a new, different genre, the "information book". In a first step Hobbs made her pre-schoolers aware

of important differences between the two genres. She carefully structured the content of her teaching to achieve a clear focus for learning. Thus the pre-schoolers learned to recognise and use one specific structural element of the genre at a time, such as looking at the front cover to guess what the book is about, or using the content page to find specific information in the book. All features taught were practiced not only receptively, but also productively in the sense that - using the teacher as a scribe - the pre-schoolers moved on to creating for themselves a piece of work in the newly acquired genre.

A striking feature in this pre-literary setting is Hobbs' explicit use of language as a teaching tool. There is an abundance of teacher talk, seemingly natural, but in reality carefully planned and formulated to keep the learners' attention focussed on the object of learning and to help them acquire the associated "terminology". Each of Hobbs' gestures or actions, such as looking at the content's page, are performed repeatedly to illustrate the use of a salient feature of the genre. These actions are not only performed physically but also intentionally and explicitly verbalized. It is particularly in the linguistic richness which Hobbs created in her first language, pre-literary classroom that there are strong parallels and possible applications to the second language classroom.

In her chapter, Lorna Fleetwood describes and evaluates in detail a lesson on "Identifying Word Formation" which she planned and taught, individually, to two ESL students, using Rubin's approach to the teaching of learning strategies. The goal of the lesson was to improve relatively advanced students' repertoire of reading strategies by teaching them, explicitly, how they can use principles of word formation to disclose word meaning. As Fleetwood remarks in her introduction, the lesson could work equally well in small groups. She also suggests that spreading the material over three lessons rather than one would be her future preference as it would offer more opportunities for practice in a structured environment.

An interesting element in Fleetwood's project is her handling of the - in a linguistic sense - quite complex rules of English word formation in a language pedagogical setting. She opts for a simplified, "layman's" approach, which does not use many of the intricate analytic linguistic skills required to achieve a more sophisticated analysis. The simplified approach makes the rules easily accessible to the students. By the same token, it has the drawback in many cases of leading to a wrong analysis. The question arises arises as to whether or not the shortcut is justified by the result; the teacher certainly

argues that it is and she turns wrong analyses into a virtue by suggesting students journal the meanings of those words for which the analysis failed, thus adding to their repertoire of strategies to enhance their command of English vocabulary.

In her paper, Livia Tigwell outlines a module of work she designed and taught to her combined Year 9/10 students to enable them to make an arrangement in German over the telephone to meet someone to do something at a mutually convenient time. In order to prepare her students for being able to carry out this complex target task Tigwell bases her curricular design on the notion of scaffolding. To this end she breaks down the single complex target task into a number of individual subtasks. In her paper she outlines and evaluates her materials' selection, teaching approach and form of assessment.

A strong feature of Tigwell's project is her focus and following through on the notion of scaffolding. In identifying concrete, more easily achievable (sub)target tasks she creates a more structured environment which provides both the learner and the teacher with a higher degree of control over the learning/teaching processes and outcomes. The subtasks, which are simpler and therefore more easily achievable enable students not only to work stepwise towards the more complex target task but also provide them with more opportunities to complete a task successfully, or, alternatively to improve their learning in manageable "bits". By the same token the teacher benefits from the explicit structure in all areas of the teaching cycle: in her curriculum development, materials selection, teaching and assessment.

We believe that these papers convey something of the scope and potential for teachers' research and that they will provide a catalyst for other teachers to investigate their own work in similar ways. As each classroom is unique, it is unlikely that these papers will provide ready made answers for other teachers. What they do provide is an insight into the ways in which teachers have sought to develop their understanding of the teaching and learning in which they participate as professionals.

Notes

1. The LIFT program was a specialist inservice professional development program for language teachers established by the ANU in co-operation with the ACT Department of Education and Training in 1993.

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A visit to the art gallery
An oral exercise in a second language

Meri Dragicevic

Introduction

In 1994, I taught Italian language at Hawker College to a group of students at the Beginning level 1-3, and a group of Beginning 4-6 together with Intermediate 1-3. Those students who were enrolled in Beginning 4-6 were students I knew quite well as I was teaching them for the second year. Those at the Intermediate level were new students, all of whom were enrolled in year 11. These two groups had their Italian lessons together and were friendly from the beginning.

In the one and a half years that I had been teaching them I had always felt that we did not have enough oral exercises. Therefore, I thought it would be worth trying to offer them a field trip to an Italian restaurant or something else with an Italian flavour. As defined by the National Centre for Research on Vocational Education "A field trip is a visit to a place outside the regular classroom designed to achieve certain objectives that cannot be achieved as well by using other means" (Muse, Chiarelott and Davidman 1982:122). Many studies have looked at the usefulness of field trips (for example Desroochers and Gardner 1981, Muse 1982, Berliner 1985, Pinero 1985, Buchanan1992) and have indicated that they are very suitable activities for learners, including language learners. The class agreed to the field trip and we talked of going to a typical Italian restaurant. But then the exhibition "European Masterpieces" came to the Australian National Gallery (ANG).

This exhibition was a good opportunity to expose the students to both Italian language and culture and offered a different kindof experience from the typical languages field trip (Harrison 1988). A choice had to be made. They were all fond of Italian cuisine but agreed that they would like to use the school facilities and cook for themselves. So it was decided to go to the Gallery. I was a little sceptical at the beginning, knowing how much preparation would be involved, and the goals a teacher sets are not always the ones which the group achieves.

I told my students I would organise the excursion, but only if they would use it not only as an informative lesson but also as an oral exercise. I wanted to test the tasks set for their level in the Unit guidelines, that is, to be able to talk about the feelings which they experienced as a result of their contact with the paintings, to express opinions about what they had seen and to make choices.

I realised that I would be asking for much more effort from them - but would not be able to give them many extra points towards their mark. But I made them an offer. I would organise the trip if they would write a diary, answer a questionnaire and prepare to give a talk on the exhibition. They all accepted enthusiastically.

The question to be investigated

As stated in the Italian Unit guidelines, students doing Italian at level Beginning 4-6 or Intermediate 1-3 should have an oral exercise as well as writing, reading and listening. All of these will help develop students' conversational abilities.

The fundamental problem for a language teacher is the getting students involved in language learning and using the language. It is a question of how to motivate students to study LOTE, and when they become motivated, how to maintain high motivation regardless of the fact that some of the students may never be able to go to Italy or to use Italian. One of the positive things about Italian is that there is a large Italian population in Australia, and their presence here is obvious in many fields – the building industry, the food industry (delicatessens and restaurants), the fashion industry (shoes, bags, women's and men's clothing) – as well as in daily TV programs, radio broadcasting and newspapers. There are also about forty associations and Italian clubs in Australia which, to varying degrees, preserve Italian customs from the various regions of Italy.

There are, of course, many books about Italy which cover Italian art, history, geography, tourist attractions and so on. They are either in Italian or in English. One could conclude that there are plenty of sources for many interesting lessons. But, is that enough? Does all that material really cover students' need to experience the language in an Italian environment? To try and answer this question I considered the following factors:

1) How to meet the Unit outlines for Italian (students should be able to express opinions, talk about feelings, make choices)?

2) Is it worth the effort to organise an excursion expecting that students will feel provoked to talk in Italian?

3) Is going to an art exhibition a good motivation for an oral exercise?

The research plan

Data to be collected

For this research I chose to observe six students from the Beginning 6 and Intermediate 3 levels. Three of the students were boys and three were girls. Three of them (2 boys and 1 girl) had an 'Italian background'. Three of the six were in year 11, and the other threewere in year 12.

I told my students that I would need to collect some data for my research and, therefore, that I needed them to keep a diary in English or in Italian whichever they preferred. They agreed that English would be easier and five of the six presented their diaries to me. They kept their notes from the day I announced the excursion to the day after the Gallery visit, when we had the final talk about it. I observed them during discussion in class and at the exhibition, and followed this up through their homework, journals and a final questionnaire. I recorded their conversation at the exhibition on tape to be able later to examine the quality and quantity of the language used.

Also, I surveyed the parents about their willingness to give their children permission to go if they considered it useful for the Italian class. All the parents gave their permission and covered the entry fee.

In addition, I talked to my English Language teacher colleague to obtain information about one student who had already been to the exhibition and to whom I intended to pay special attention. I also kept a record of my observations in my research journal.

The gallery visit as a language activity

I had a number of concerns about the trip and so did the students. My concerns were similar to those identified by a survey done for the National Institute of Education and edited by Mary Budd Rowe on the:

> numerous disadvantages associated with field trips. Among these were (a) a lack of control by the teachers over what was learned; (b) the wide variety of inappropriate stimuli students could react to; (c) the difficulty in providing necessary feedback to each student after a particular experience; and (d) the problems associated with focusing student attention on at least a minimum set of key stimuli. Certainly, these conditions also exist in an in-class learning experience, and some may bristle at the emphasis on teacher control over a situation fraught with considerable possibilities for expressive outcomes.
>
> (Muse, Chiarelott and Davidman 1982: 123)

To help overcome my concerns I planned my research in detail. This approach is supported by Pinero:

> What you can control is adequate planning. And that will ensure that the field trip will be a valuable instructional activity for your students... But when planning the activities, don't forget they should be teacher-directed, not teacher-provided. Although you will need to guide students' explorations, don't forget to encourage their questions and speculations
>
> (Pinero, 1985: 15).

The students had two concerns. The first reaction from some of them was that they did not have enough knowledge about art to converse in English. How then could they speak about it in Italian? Secondly, they felt that they did not have enough words in Italian to express what they did know about art. That suggested to me that we had to undertake more activities to help them overcome their concerns. From my experience, and as stated by Buchanan (1992): "PRE" activities help promote student security as they already will have some familiarity with the field trip. Plus, "PRE" activities create a sense of anticipation before the field trip, and help students value the educational aspects that occur "DURING" the experience. (Buchanan, 1992: 17)

We undertook fifteen steps . These are shown in three stages:

1. Preparation for the art exhibition
2. The activities at the ANG
3. The activities after the art exhibition

1. Preparation for the art exhibition

The first thing we did to improve their oral presentation and develop their confidence was to have three lessons from a book "Sempre avanti". Each student had to summarise a small part of the lesson and present it orally in front of the class and I recorded it. After that we listened and gave comments on the quality of the presentation.

The second was to go to the library and study expressions used in books on art. That vocabulary was recorded and shared among the students. Not only did they find those lessons interesting but they felt confident in recycling that vocabulary later on in the Gallery. At the lessons they seldom asked for my help, they used dictionaries and translated what they wanted to say. Some of them were not risk-takers, they stuck with phrases they already knew, such as "This is a green dress. The woman has brown hair." etc. I sought to identify those students who were "swimming" in a known environment and those who were exploring. I wrote down my observations without much discussion with the students. I did mention in passing, to those students who were exploring, that this was a good way to go. And when they were using an expression in front of others I suggested a "better" or correct way to express it so that everyone could write it in their exercise books. I noticed that both groups did write them down for future use.

I feared that after all those lessons about art they would say that they had talked enough about art, and would not be interested in the Gallery. In fact, they were keen to do it, and their enthusiasm did not vanish. That was a good start.

The third thing I did was to give them one more input session about the exhibition. I asked each student to choose three descriptions from the ANG catalogue (in English) and to translate these into Italian as homework. The students would then have to present these descriptions to the other students when we came in front of those particular paintings. That way I hoped to have something for each of them to say in Italian at the ANG, as I was still uncertain how they would feel about speaking in Italian all the time.

To make sure that I would have enough background information and that I would know what to expect from the exhibition, I went a few days earlier with another group of students. I hired a tape with information on the exhibition. The goal of that visit was to see original paintings of Italian masters not to improve in any way their Italian language. Half of the students toured the exhibition with me and listened carefully to the information from the tape, the others went separately without much interest in hearing anything. My fear increased that students from the target group might behave the same way.

I used the opportunity of this first visit to check with the staff in the ANG that it would not be any problem if I used a tape recorder to record my students' talks. This was agreed.

As I knew that the English teacher had taken her class to the exhibition and we had already talked about my research, I asked about her experiences with her group. I wanted to know particularly how my targeted student had behaved, and whether she was interested or involved. My colleague responded that the group behaved well, but that there was not much comment from students. The targeted girl was not an exception.

At this point I knew that the targeted girl could still change her mind and say that she was not interested to go (and pay) for the exhibition again.

I offered to check the students' translations of the descriptions. Four of them showed them to me and I corrected a few minor grammatical errors.

At this point I asked students whether they ever thought about Italian outside the class. (It is important to remember that among the six students there were two boys and one girl who had Italian backgrounds). One of those boys said he practiced Italian at home only when his grandparents came to visit them or when the family had reunions, weddings, or funerals when the majority of the conversation among older family members was conducted in Italian. The other boy said that he found himself translating songs, or street signs.

2. The activities at the ANG

The day of the visit to the ANG arrived. In my car I took two boys and one girl from the Intermediate group (half of my target group). The conversation was not about the exhibition or even school. It was all in English, but surprisingly when I said something in Italian they responded in Italian.

Before we entered the gallery, I repeated to the students that my expectation was to hear them talking Italian as much as possible. I set my tape recorder and we went in. The students chose to talk about the paintings right at the beginning of the room. The first student, without any hesitation, stood in front of the painting and said almost by heart (with some checking of her notes) what she had translated from the catalogue. At the end she asked if there were any comments or questions, and there were some. The same scenario continued with each painting. One of the students had forgotten his notes but he said as much as he remembered and improvised what he could as he observed the paintings. This gave me the opportunity to observe my students' linguistic and cultural strengths. I made mental notes of their

strengths and jotted down useful notes on any language difficulties. I remained an observer and decided not to enforce Italian speaking or interact with the students until after the activity. I wanted the students to see me as an information resource rather than a language instructor. (see Buchanan, 1992)

For the paintings on which they did not have translated comments, I said what I knew about them and they stood patiently and listened to my comments in Italian. Their questions to me and their comments on those paintings were in Italian as well. The comments between themselves were also in Italian. On several occasions the students began their sentences in English and then without any prompting tried to say the same thing in Italian.

The girl who was at the exhibition with the English teacher had a few valuable comments, and she felt happy to share that information with the others in Italian.

We were trying to be quiet and not disturb the other visitors, but sometimes we did attract their attention. When the students realised that a group of elderly ladies was watching them with sympathetic eyes, they were even louder and more competitive. Just as with native Italian groups, their questions and humour were often made by cutting across each others' comments.

On the way back in the car I had the same group of students. They looked a bit tired and flat. The first comment was from a girl in Italian: "I've seen nicer paintings, there were too many with religious motives." and after that she switched into English. I did not insist on Italian , I thought that two and a half hours of exposure was quite an immersion and that they deserved a break. I was proud of their behaviour, serious approach to the task, attitude, and willingness to stick to their promise to do their best. I think they surprised themselves too.

3. The activities after the art exhibition

As stated in other research:

> This brings us to the return destination of any field trip experience: the classroom. This is where experiences can be relived, speculations analysed, unanswered questions researched and collected materials examined. If you don't discuss the field trip in relation to the content being studied, you'll lose an important lesson. And students also need to understand that they are responsible for knowledge gained through a field trip as they are for textbook information. Failure to require this follow-up devalues the field trip's instructional purpose.
>
> (Pinero, 1985: 15)

The next day when we were listening to part of the tape their comments were: "Is that really me?" "Good, very good!" For that lesson I recycled student-generated language from the ANG visit and was surprised to see how much they produced. I designed the lesson for error correction, more conversational practice and even writing activities. We did not have much time then, but I am sure that student language generated from the excursion could be reused and spiraled into new lessons. I also believe that it provided ample opportunities to further students' understanding and use of Italian, which is what Buchanan (1992) found after her field trips.

I went through the tape again to see how much the students had really talked and what they said. Analysing their comments from the tape I realised that we covered an enormous range of topics:

colours
body parts
clothing and jewellery
numbers
family members
animals, flowers, vegetables and fruits
buildings - rooms, furniture
kitchen and utensils
history stories from the "Bible"
characters, facial expressions
famous Italian cities (Venezia, Roma)
social hierarchy from peasants to the queen
techniques in painting (touch of the brush, very hard movement)
hobbies, entertainments (such as hunting ducks and foxes)

Students used words and expressions such as "prostitutes", "selling themselves", "cut of his head".

It also indicates that the students know far more language than they exhibit in response to classroom drills. When they wish to communicate, they find the linguistic - and paralinguistic- means to get their message across. Also, they are very willing to learn new language when they see a use for it and have only to be furnished with the missing word or phrase to quickly assimilate it. (see Stevens, 1983)

In grammar students used Present Tense, Perfect Tense and Imperative Mood. Several times they used Future and Imperfect, even though

these tenses were only recently introduced to them.

> In a non-threatening atmosphere students produce communicative language - even if it is replete with grammatical errors - but these should be considered to be creative mistakes - indicating a transition period between non-language and acceptable speech. Practice, they say makes perfect. But practice here does not mean endless repetition of the same structure. Rather it means the opportunity for students to develop confidence in their ability to cope with the language.
>
> (Stevens, 1983: 268)

One of the surprising things for me was the quantity of prepositions with the articles used correctly (even by a girl who, when writing, had many problems with them).

I prepared a questionnaire for the students to complete. Summarizing their responses I concluded that the students saw this trip as a part of - rather than apart from- the classroom learning experience.

Also, I would like to comment on an aspect which I did not research. I had a strong feeling that this excursion strengthened the sense of community in this classroom - it promoted group cooperation, stimulated meaningful communication, and faster personal interaction both in and out of the classroom, simply because we were in an informal atmosphere which is not easily duplicated in the classroom. (see Buchanan 1992)

4. Students' comments in their DIARIES:

During the 15 days preparation for this excursion, I asked and reminded the students to record their daily experiences in a diary. This diary consisted of a small booklet comprising a few questions (how often they found themselves thinking in Italian outside the classroom; how they felt about speaking on the exhibition in the ANG, their judgment on the excursion as an oral exercise)

Five out of six diaries were submitted and some comments were:

> (7/9) "On Monday our class will go to the art gallery. Art is OK. Sometimes it's a bit boring. I think $3 is too much. It should be free. Anyway, I am not sure whether I will speak much Italian. It will depend on how I feel on the day".

> (10/9) "In a couple days, we will go on the Italian excursion to the art gallery. I have just finished translating the portrait descriptions into Italian. I found I had to rely upon the dictionary quite a bit. I'm still not sure how much Italian I will speak on the excursion. We don't get much of a chance to speak outside of the classroom, so maybe, it will inspire me to use the language".

(13/9) "Well as I kind of expected, being in a different environment did inspire me to use the vocabulary I have learnt. I found that, I wanted to prove to myself I could use the language outside assessment. Though I found I became quite tired after a while! It becomes brain erasing trying to speak in another language, especially when we don't use it as much as we should! As for the exhibition, it was OK I found many paintings to be much of the same thing, so it got a little boring after a while. Still, it was very cultural, so I'm glad I saw it!"

(12/9) "In all I found the whole experience very interesting. I really enjoyed having an excursion in the unit, and believe that future excursions and activities outside the classroom would not only make the Italian unit more enjoyable, but I also think that it would be beneficial to the way we study the Italian language...I think that in the area of cultural studies, not so much in the language, is where further excursions would give the most benefit".

"I find that the more Italian I do and the more exposure I get to the language the more I think about it and use it. For example, in Trimester 1 our major assignment was to design a tour through Italy in 100 words in Italian. After writing 100 words in Italian I found myself as I walked or rode down the street, translating songs in my head into Italian. The more Italian I did the more words I would remember. Speaking was still a bit scratchy because I had to think things through before saying them."

"I found our Italian trip to the ANG very good for my Italian speaking. Although there was a lot of walking involved I find it is a lot easier to talk Italian when we do different activities as a class, not just the same old class lessons. It is also good because we are speaking Italian in everyday situations around the town outside of the classroom which helps a lot".

"The things that make me try to speak Italian are quite obscure. I try to translate posters I see, the words of songs I hear and when I'm around people speaking Italian. When I'm in contact with anything Italian I tend to attempt to think in Italian. I wonder if when we are at ANG the same thing will happen!?"

"Went to the Exhibition today, it was superb! To actually see the paintings I've seen so many time in books, in real life...The exhibition definitely made me want to speak Italian. I didn't think it could be just by reading the artists names and hearing other people (Meri) around you speaking Italian made me want to also. It seemed to be more "authentic" to be commenting on the paintings in the language that they were originally discussed with"

In summary, I consider that the students responded favorably to both the speaking and monitoring aspects of the activity. They seemed to enjoy speaking spontaneously and appeared comfortable with the task of creating

the conversation. They experienced speaking as a creative act and listening as an attentive process. (see Buchanan, 1992).

Conclusion

It seems to me that the use of an a exhibition as an oral exercise in a second language has not been much explored so far. All the references I found (which was after my experiment) were the researches of field trips for other purposes. Nevertheless, I have discovered from this excursion that some of the conclusions are the same.

First of all, to get maximum benefit from any excursion, the teacher initially has to identify those lessons that would be particularly facilitated by first hand experience (Pinero, 1985). Plans for the field trip itself must anchor your students' experiences to the instructional objectives. Which unusual activities will help students retain knowledge? (Pinero, 1985). When planning for a field trip it is critical to consider participants' (students and teacher) input in the selection of field trips, as there is a better chance that students will benefit from the field trip - as they will naturally be more interested in and motivated about trips they help to select. Also, the teacher is more likely to develop creative "PRE", "DURING" and "POST" activities if the teacher and students see the educational value of the trip. (see Buchanan, 1992).

The objective must be clear: What are students expected to learn or do. Also, I found the field trip very similar to an immersed classroom, therefore the statements by Stevens (1983) could be easily implemented here: The effectiveness lies in the motivation created when students participate in the decision making process, in the students' commitment to learning through choice, which results from that participation, in the opportunity to use meaningful language in real situations, and in the ability to interact with peers and teacher in an informal atmosphere. In this regard, planning and going to visit the art exhibition fulfilled all these requirements. As Muse et al. state:

> it implies that field trips can be an extremely valuable learning device if used judiciously. For certain learning styles, field trips may prove to be highly productive in terms of achievement, especially for students who are predominantly visual/ tactile/ kinesthetic learners. The key to effective utilization rests with the teacher's capability in organizing, sequencing, focusing and evaluating the field trip for the needs of each learner and in providing an experience consistent with the outcomes desired.
>
> (Muse, Chiarelott and Davidman 1982: 125)

Also, Stevens' remarks, I believe, fully reflect the outcomes and experiences of this field trip:

> the positive effects include: the motivation to communicate, because students are not responding to questions to which everyone already knows the answers; a non-threatening atmosphere which permits physical movement during class time and support for ego development in such areas as decision making and organizing material. The interaction with their peers provides children with feedback on their product of performance, which is directed at the information presented rather than at a personal level. Finally, students take responsibility for their own learning; they make choices and commit themselves, rather than following the same program as everyone else.
>
> (Stevens, 1983: 269)

Of course it would be to ambitious to say that a group of 10 students proves that an art exhibition is necessarily a good way to provoke them to use their second language, but there were some key points which made this trip a success:

- The students and the teacher were highly motivated to participate in an out-of -the -classroom activity interesting to all the participants
- The authentic Italian atmosphere - (Italian flavour of the paintings)
- The interaction with other students and showing off in front of other visitors (I think the interaction with other students was less important as they have that in every lesson. The same goes for me as a teacher because I said to them that I would not be giving them any mark for their presentation. This had to be a trip for pure pleasure and to help me do this research).
- Every participant took responsibility to make the trip a success.

Now let's go back to the three factors I raised at the beginning. From this research I conclude that:

1) Unit guidelines can be met by organizing an excursion, as it involves all the activities that will lead the students to express opinions, talk about feelings and make choices.

2) If the trip is well planned, and students are responsible, it is worth the effort to organize such an activity because the students benefit by being stimulated to use the second language intensively. I also found that in an environment where the students were encouraged

to speak mostly in Italian, I could use only Italian with them. Unlike in the class situation where students often press for responses/ explanations in English.

3) As a visit to the art exhibition was the students' choice, it provided good motivation to communicate in the second language.

We can see that the visit to the gallery had a number of successful outcomes and proved to be a positive experience in using Italian for the students. Berliner has asked: "Can field trips really be justified? New research data suggest they certainly can be! The researchers also describe ways to make sure they are worthwhile learning experiences." (Berliner, 1985: 14). My study supports this view. The amount of language spoken in two hours, the activities undertaken before and after the trip to the gallery, the quality of students' responses in written Italian, their motivation (which was even greater than before the trip), assured me that there was no need to plan a potentially less demanding trip to a restaurant to save my face as a teacher, nor theirs as students. What a gift it was to go to the ANG!

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Encouraging class cohesiveness in the LOTE classroom

Corine Cordes

Introduction

The following is an account of a research project I conducted to see if I could increase the interactive participation of a group of three students in a Continuing Year 11 French class. I tired to do this by changing my teaching strategies slightly to encourage more group work, particularly with randomly selected partners. My intention was to become more proactive in integrating these three students with other members of the class, without making them aware that I was somewhat concerned at their behaviour during French lessons. My first step was to initiate more frequent random pairing or random grouping of students for pair/group work.

During the course of the research I became involved in trialling the Key Competency, Working Together, and in Teams in the LOTE classroom. I was asked to set up an activity demonstrating this Key Competency. I found myself linking this with my initial aims for the research project, the activity providing the key to developing class cohesiveness. The outcome was a positive one beyond my expectations.

The Context

The students in the class came from a range of feeder high schools - four in all. The largest proportion were from one high school. As the latter group

had come from two French classes in that school, they were not well acquainted. Some were friends and therefore sat together. For the majority of these students this did not affect their attention span, involvement in the lesson or their willingness to listen to French spoken by the teacher or by fellow students.

The three students of concern were from one school and were friends. Two sat next to each other (students A and B), another sat one seat further along (student C). I found it relevant to learn from students A and B that the French class was their only common class. They viewed the class partly as an opportunity for catching up on their gossip, although that was not the reason for their joining the class. Colleagues in my staffroom who also taught two of the students commented that their behaviour was not a problem.

The three students in question not only distracted each other but also drew neighbouring friends into their dialogues by way of humour or questions. I found their short attention span during teacher talk and explanations, which often came about because of questioning by other students, the most difficult to cope with. Class discussion was either in French or English, with an inclination to incorporate an increasing amount of French. In fact the majority of the class appeared to appreciate the amount of French they were hearing. Students had expressed the view that this greater use of French in the classroom was an appreciated change from high school teaching practice. For students A and B using French for class discussion was often a sign to switch on to their own discussions and I would find myself having to speak above them.

I thought I would be able to modify the students' behaviour by encouraging them to work with a variety of partners during pair/group work rather than always the same people. In this way I hoped they would be made to begin to feel more part of the entire group.

In this particular class I had not previously encouraged random pairing for pair/group work but rather had allowed students to work with their neighbours or near neighbours. The only occasion they may have worked with some one different was if their usual partners were absent. Although the pair work partners for the targetted three students often changed within the group of four students sitting near each other, the students did not work with students who sat on the other side of the room. A sense of belonging to a larger group was not particularly evident in this class.

First Step

My first step was to randomly group the students using a range of methods when doing pair/group work on a number of occasions. One method used

was to repeat all the numbers twice, when issuing students with a number, and then to ask students to partner with the matching number. I journalled my observations of such groupings.

Results

Students did not have any problems with the random pairing initially. In fact I was pleasantly surprised by the positive communication occuring between the students including student B (who was averaging a C) with a very fluent student. After the initial random pairing of these two they actually elected to pair again next day when I again randomly paired, but my method had not been fullproof. I gave one half of the class the number one, the other number two and asked students to find a partner with the other number. The aim, on this occasion, was to have students from the left side of the room work with students on the right side of the room. The above mentioned two students gravitated to each other a second time.

The students in general appeared to place value on moving away from their normal social milieu. More able students were happy to do a bit of peer tutoring with a weaker partner where they saw this as useful. The students certainly stayed on task and I felt comfortable moving around the classroom to observe their interaction and give help where necessary. I appreciated the changed dynamics occuring in the classroom. A certain amount of socialising also occurred which I was happy about, as an underlying aim had been to encourage the class to become a cohesive group.

Student C moved voluntarily on a number of subsequent occasions to other vacant seats in the classroom, next to consistently conscientious students. On one occasion she publicly announced her move to the 'good' side of the room (her words) and worked very well on some individual work. In my view she felt empowered to move consciously from her usual grouping because this had already been encouraged and practised by the random pairing and she had both enjoyed and benefited from the experience.

Verbal comments from the students indicated that they did not mind random pairing, however it did not always work for all the students and sometimes students were relieved when, on their suggestion and my agreement, they worked in friendship groups. As this became less frequent I found that the three students usually stayed more on task and that student C, in fact, had ceased being a problem, that is she stayed on task and did not get involved in discussions with the other two. In effect she had broken away from the other two rather than joining in on their chit-chat or encouraging it.

Some students did not hit it off together well. When they were set a task they just did not spark and were pleased to get back to their own seats. This did not happen often.

Analysis

The students certainly did not work less effectively by having to work with differing partners.

My perception was that by forcing students to work outside their normal social milieu individual students became more confident in offering comments, even in French, when the whole class was listening. As students had worked in pairs with a whole range of students they were more tolerant of listening to what others had to say. This applied also to the three students under specific observation.

Because I was consciously trying to resolve the problem of three talkative students, I was much more conscious of my teaching practices. I became more aware of when I was alert and responsive to student needs and when I moved back to old patterns that did not necessarily work, namely an excess of teacher talk, which appeared appropriate and enjoyable for a small attentive minority who encouraged the dialogue, but was inappropriate for a larger number who needed hands on activities. On such occasions and depending on the time of day it was inevitable that students A and B would drift off into discussion.

Second Step

I felt I had found a way of increasing the interactive participation of the three students and had improved the learning climate in the class but this still required a lot of energy on my part. The Year 11 Continuing French class had not yet completely jelled as a group. I wished to further improve the learning climate.

At this stage I involved the class in a pilot project on the Key Competencies as described by Mayer et al (1992). The ACT Department of Education had initiated trialing of the Key Competencies within ACT schools.

The class's involvement in this project came about as a result of the Department's invitation to have two neighbouring schools trial a particular Key Competency over a number of subject areas. Our school was to trial

Working Together and in Teams, Key Competency 4. I decided to involve this particular group, as the aims of the Key Competency fitted in with what I was trying to achieve, namely to have students work together as a group, to develop group and by that I meant class cohesiveness.

After a workshop organised by the department on the Key Competencies I decided to modify an assessment item the students had already been asked to prepare, namely preparation of a scene from the theatrical adaptation of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le petit prince*. Students could choose their own partners and the scene. Though I was encouraging random pairing in the class activities, I felt it appropriate that they choose their own partners for the play. Some chose on the basis of similar ability, others on friendship grounds.

Initially the students were asked to prepare a scene to class performance standard, as a pair. After the workshop I decided to suggest to the students that they perform the play as though it were an integrated whole. There would be seven *petits princes* but we would try to have each scene following on from the other so that an audience would recognise that the seven individuals represented one character.

The students became involved in working out how to achieve this effectively and we decided to perform the play at a local primary school with which a student had already made contact. In this way the final performance rose to live performance standard, and was no longer just an assessment item to be done at school. Of the three students, student C partnered with student B, while student A partnered with her other neighbour.

I continued to use random pairing in class activities, for example in information gap and information exchange activities, crosswords where students give clues verbally to one another in French, and activities based on the textbook, but preparation for the play became very time consuming with positive results.

I videoed the class doing a class activity after the performance. The activity involved two steps. Step one was a questionnaire that students sought answers to, in a pair. Step two was discussion of their individual responses with the rest of the class. They were led into discussion with questions from the teacher. The activity was conducted in French.

Results

Students' written comments indicate that, as a result of the play activity, the students felt more cohesive as a group. As a group students had to work on

costuming (we chose two common items of clothing to signify the prince, namely a beret and a cloak), scenery, makeup, and script (a bi-lingual version for the primary school audience). The successful performance was dependent on the effectiveness of each pair's performance.

Both the French speaking primary teacher and I were impressed by everyone's performance. I was particularly impressed with the quality of the performance of students B and C. They chose small parts, however they were performed with great skill. The audience reaction could not but help improve their self esteem. When asked, students agreed that learning and performing the lines was helping oral fluency.

Video

All students were occupied in doing the questionnaire. Students A and B engaged in some discussion with each other but were not disruptive to others. They completed the task in plenty of time. In step two, although students A and B were very careful with their responses, that is were careful to use a good French accent, they tended to drift into their own conversation, while others were still answering or expanding on answers. I had to call them to attention at least four times. It would appear that their behaviour, when left to their own devices, had improved to the extent that they finished a set task within the set time limit, however they still engaged in quite a bit of chit-chat.

Analysis

By random pairing of groups in the first step, the groundwork had been laid for the second step. That first step had helped students break down some of the barriers that existed in the class in terms of mixing outside of known social groups. We appeared to communicate better as a group prior to embarking on the second step and the class appeared receptive to the possibilities of the new task. There was a greater element of trust amongst the students. This may have contributed to the success of the performance. The lines were executed with no lines forgotten, the play worked as a whole and the audience was delighted by the performance.

From the student reaction I had the sense that each student felt valued as a result of his/her involvement in the play, however small the part. In fact some of the smaller parts had greater visual and auditory impact and the primary students could understand some of the lines. The play created a certain amount of bonding amongst the students and from there we returned to classwork and some reading of French poetry. At this point I was surprised

at some of the perceptive comments made by student A on one of the poems under study, *Barbara* by Jacques Prévert. All three student improved their results in this semester.

Discussion

I feel I became more responsive to the students as individuals, particularly students A, B and C, and gave more praise in response to their responses when they were particularly good. I was surprised both by the perceptive comments of one of the students on a poem under study and her willingness to express them to the class, albeit in English. Students A, B and C became more drawn into the dialogue of the class.

Perhaps I became less fixed in my expectations of what the students were capable of doing and more open to surprises. By encouraging random pairing, I was helping to change habit patterns both for myself and the students. Building on this, students were willing to tackle the play project.

Buoyed by the success of the larger project, I became less concerned at the few times student A and B returned to chit-chat. They did respond more quickly to a request for their participation or silence.

I was interested to note the responsible behaviour and hard work of student B when student A was absent towards the end of term. Whereas in the past she may have found another to chat to during the lesson, she used these lessons as an opportunity for some conscientious work and exercised a lot of self discipline. I also noted that she was more eager to offer answers relating to work we were doing on the board. There appeared an improved relationship with the teacher. We both seemed more respectful towards each other.

I see random pairing in doing pair/group work and play performance, where the entire class is actively involved in a production, as very useful teaching strategies to encourage communication amongst students and to foster class cohesiveness. They are strategies I need to use regularly.

Conclusion

During the life of the research project I employed two methods to increase the involvement of three students, in particular, in the French class. My

involvement in the research has given me increased confidence in being proactive in setting up groups. Random grouping does not work between all students but overall the benefits appear to outweigh the occasional lack of chemistry between students.

I see random pairing as a very useful strategy. The activity that really pulled the students together, however, was the play.

I feel there to be a great deal of scope for including more drama within a language class and I am contemplating using a similar approach with a composite Indonesian class. I intend using this strategy for the same reason that I used it with the French class, that is to encourage greater tolerance and communication amongst students and improve group cohesiveness. If students feel relaxed in the class they are currently in, it stands to reason that they will do better. I do not think that I shall ever completely eliminate chit-chat, however I feel I have some strategies that I would use again to bring it down to what in my view is an acceptable level.

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Can card games promote the sustained use of LOTE between students?

Thérèse Dupé

Introduction

> In a perfect world... the ideal sales clerk finds the ideal customer to whom to sell the ideal product. On the occasions that such interactions are found in real life, it is possible to predict almost fully what each person will say to each other. In the classroom, the level of predictability is even higher whenever students are required to recite prepared dialogues.
>
> (Di Pietro 1987: 8)

Even though there has been a strong push towards a "communicative" approach in teaching languages other than English (LOTE), the above scenario of using prepared dialogues has not entirely disappeared. Students still prepare dialogues and then present them to the class. Liddicoat points out that this is "a form of reading out aloud - even if the text is memorised.... The technique fails as oral interaction in that it is a productive task not a receptive task." (Liddicoat 1996: 5)

At this point the LOTE teacher is presented with a problem. How to develop sustained spontaneous interaction between students using the LOTE? Or at least how to provide opportunities in the classroom for students to work towards being able to use language flexibly.

If using prepared dialogues is the only communication between students there is a strong risk of students always relying on props and only responding to set cues. They will not be taking risks with the LOTE. This is

not an ideal way to know a language. Also it gives students very little opportunity to progress. One way to assess student progress is using the LOTE Profile. The Profile outlines a hierarchy of skills using LOTE. When referring to oral interaction the Profile places "spontaneous speech" in level 8, the highest level. (Australian Education Council 1994: 6)

Although level 8 may seem very remote from the primary sector, even there teachers would like to see their students having some autonomy in their use of oral language. The problem in primary school however is that many teachers have very little contact time with students.

In this project I attempted to use a simple strategy to encourage students to speak to each other in Italian during a class activity. The aim of the project was to see if during the social activity of playing cards, students could maintain some kind of sustained conversation in Italian. The "spontaneity" would come from the students' being able to manipulate known phrases and expressions.

To ask students to simply "talk" is not always practical. Some students do not wish to speak to each other in a foreign language. "Many students have to overcome a psychological barrier before they are prepared to speak in the foreign language." (Nolasco and Arthur 1994: 23)

From my observation over the years, this can be due to a number a factors such as shyness, fear, prejudice and inability to cope with the task. This is where set pieces can be a springboard, "... there is an argument for the use of controlled activities which help students develop confidence..." (Nolasco and Arthur 1994: 23) As Gabrielle Kasper points out

> ... beginning learners use short, packaged formulae ... there appears to be an important role for prefabricated speech in pragmatic development.
>
> (Kasper in press: 15-16)

In my view then, as well as encouraging students to talk it was necessary to use activities that would have a set of formulaic expressions. When people play cards they need to follow certain protocols and use expressions that are associated with a particular card game, "Another card?", "I have a Jack and two Queens" and so forth. From this point of view playing cards would be suitable.

Perhaps using a game would be regarded as a "filler" or a distraction? However, I wanted to use an activity that is used when people socialise. Also "games [can] offer a natural context for communication between children." (Retter and Valls 1984: 1)

Card-playing is an activity that can be a part of any setting where people socialise. It is definitely an activity that has many "natural contexts', on the train, at home and even in a classroom. It is also an important social pastime in the Italian community, as it is in certain parts of the Australian community. In this way I was introducing a culturally appropriate pastime with which most students were familiar. This can be very useful for those students who are not always appreciative of things "foreign." Kasper advises us to:

> ... take advantage of activities which are both familiar to the students and consistent with the teacher's desire to increase student activity.
>
> (Kasper in press: 24)

This can also do away with the kind of "cultural imperialism" she mentions with regard to a classroom teacher who insists on imposing the culture of the LOTE in an exclusive way (Kasper in press).

The Context of the Project

Participants

Target group: This group was a composite class of 24 Year 4/5 students - age 10/11. Most had been doing Italian for 3 years but seemed to retain very little compared to other classes in the school. There was one Italian background student. A few students came from other backgrounds, notably German, Sri Lankan, Croatian and Polish. Most students spoke only English at home. Some were quite cynical about "things foreign". This class was considered by anyone who dealt with them as a "challenge".

Class teacher: My role as a specialist LOTE teacher is to work unsupported with the class for two 30 minute lessons per week. The class teacher was very supportive of the project and helped with organising the taping when necessary. She could give no language support but helped with explaining the game "Cheat" to some students.

Why the project? There seemed to have been very little real interaction in the class between students in Italian apart from set dialogues. I discussed this with the students. They seemed reasonably interested in trying activities that would involve more unpredictable conversation, especially when I said we would be using cards. Speaking to each other in a foreign language was not really a high priority with this group so the

enthusiasm had to be generated from the activity. It is was little like "trapping" someone into learning!

The project itself was carried out with the students and myself. It would take place over 8 to 9 lessons in all, 6 to 7 consecutive lessons a break and then 2 more lessons.

It was important to inform the students of what was to happen in those lessons. I explained to them that the lessons using the cards would be taped on cassette and that I would be checking on their use of Italian during the activities. It was important to make them take the task seriously and not regard it as an opportunity to "overact", something that comes very naturally to this group. The classroom teacher gave support by saying that they were being involved in a special project. Once this was done it was not mentioned again as it was necessary to make the classroom setting a normal one.

As I was involved in collecting oral samples for the ACT Modern Languages Teachers' Association project I told them they would eventually be videotaped once they were confident with what they were doing. They were very excited by this prospect.

Before actually beginning the project it was necessary to look at card playing as a social activity. We had been looking at "what we like to do in our spare time" so the discussion was in context. Many students played cards at home and so regarded it as enjoyable pastime. They could see that it was something that people from all over the world could enjoy. Students were then introduced to Italian playing cards which are different to the Anglo-French cards commonly used in many Western countries. The students really enjoyed looking at them. They were also surprised to learn that not everyone uses the cards with which they are so familiar.

For the class I had prepared two sets of cards: ten normal decks and ten decks from which I had removed the 8's, 9's and 10's. These were for the Italian game we were to play. It was unfortunately too expensive to buy ten packs of Italian playing cards.

After gaining permission from the principal to allow betting (it is already used in Maths for studying probability!) we were ready to begin.

The First Task

Collecting data for evaluation

A large cassette recorder was placed in different parts of the classroom at different intervals to record students' voices. I walked around to each group

and wrote up my findings in a journal. Groups were videotaped from time to time and students had a sheet to record the number of times English was spoken. This was eventually abandoned as it did not work well with this class. The data collection was the same for each task.

Method

We stepped back a little in class time to the work we had been doing on descriptions. I wanted to use vocabulary with which they were reasonably familiar to play a game called "Guess Who?". This is an information gap type game where two small groups of students (or two students) each has a set of faces on a commercially produced board. Each group has one of the faces hidden away. The object of the game is to work out which face the other group has hidden through a series of questions about facial characteristics.

I wanted to use this game before playing cards to get the class used to the routine of playing a game and also speaking to each other in Italian using simple questions and familiar vocabulary. Also "Guess Who?" is a game that requires very focussed language . It seemed like an appropriate stepping stone to playing cards, which is an activity that can have more variables.

Each group of six students was given a version of the game. We revised some of the vocabulary. "Cheat sheets" were available with each game for those that were stuck.

Results

The students focussed on the task and asked the questions in Italian. Some of the groups were videotaped. Most of the students used Italian but did not stray from basic expressions such as *Ha gli occhi blu?* (Has she/he got blue eyes?) or *Porta gli occhiali?* (Does she/he wear glasses?). I had anticipated that this would happen.

The use of the "cheat sheet" varied, but at least one member from each group used it as a support for playing the game.

One boy in one group won very quickly. We had not really had time to discuss how to finish the game. The lesson is only 30 minutes long. However I was also curious to see what would happen when students needed more language. He struggled but was determined to win. He suddenly remembered *è* (is/ is it?) and made his own sentence, *È Fred?* Consequently he was able to win.

Analysis

The game was a success in that it achieved its purpose of getting the students to speak to each other in Italian while playing a game and using set vocabulary. They also became familiar with the routine of playing a board game during Italian time.

The activity by its nature has a predictable set of responses which for my purpose was fine. Students were focussed and many finished the game well using very little English. Many used none at all. Where they came into problems was when they needed to stray from the phrases associated with asking about someone's description. The expressions they needed we had read the year before and had even used them in radio plays, for example, *Ho vinto io!* (I won!) and *è ...* (it is ...). This is where those students that are beginning to move up from Level 2 to Level 3 according to the Languages Profile begin to become more obvious. The near level 3 students searched their memory until they were able to re-use the sentences in a new context. They were moving from simply repeating words and phrases to trying to manipulate words into new contexts. This was done for two lessons.

The Second Task

The students were now familiar with playing in their groups and had already experienced using very formulaic Italian with each other. We had already talked about card playing and discussed it once more, this time looking at what they might need to know to say to each other to get through a game. The fact that they had already played a game where they had become tongue-tied gave them ideas on what they needed to say. "I won" was one of the first sentences they needed to know!

We put the words and phrases that they thought would be necessary up on the blackboard. I also gave them a sheet with useful words and some cultural information.

The first game was "Cheat" which I called *Imbroglione*. Most students knew how to play this. For those that did not there was help from the classroom teacher and myself. This game mostly needed numbers, the names of the face cards and *imbroglione!* (cheat!) so the vocabulary was not extensive.

In order to monitor the use of English each group was given a sheet, *Le Penitenze* or "punishment" sheet, to record the use of English by each player. It was made into a game to encourage participation. The winner in

the class would be the one with the least number of points. Also the sheets were to have been another way of recording the level of the use of the LOTE.

Students were divided into 7 to 8 groups of 2 to 5 students. Each leader came to collect a pack of cards.

Results

One word: chaos! This class has many strong personalities and unfortunately they all felt it was necessary to change the rules as the game progressed. Small brawls broke out, the class had to be stopped and we had to begin again! However time was up. It needed one more try. Needless to say the recording of *penitenze* for the use English on the sheet was seen as unnecessary at this point. From listening to the tape recording I noted that there were some trusty students persevering with the game and the numbers and the names of the face cards can be heard in Italian. These two groups did record the number of times English was spoken on their sheet. Of the other 5 groups one used the sheet to record scores, the others seemed to be very generous in their scoring.

Analysis

The activity at this point did not seem to have been a success. Having taught for many years in both secondary and primary schools, I have noticed that when students are very familiar with an activity or an object introduced into a class there can sometimes be problems. This does not discount Kasper's (in press) view that using the familiar can be useful but I believe that sometimes students can have too much familiarity. In such a case they can almost claim ownership and so they run with the activity too strongly. As a result of using a game with which they were so familiar in their own home, they were not really cooperating with each other nor communicating. There was too much "baggage" associated with this game at this point.

Also the task was not as focussed as "Guess Who?" nor as challenging. There was little vocabulary and the game can be very monotonous if the players do not enter into the spirit of the game.

The Third Task

Method

This was the same as for the previous lesson except that I did not use the sheet for students to record English. Also students were warned that they

would be asked to no longer be involved with the game if they tried to intimidate anyone.

Results

This time students played the game quite well. There was some heated discussion between some students. There was more use of Italian with about three groups using the language. Unfortunately the headstrong students only spoke Italian when they could see me next to them, they did not even make an effort when the recorder was near them.

Analysis

I felt that part of the problem lay in the game itself. Perhaps it was too much of an "English" speaking game for this group. I did use the activity with a Grade 6 and they loved it and used a lot of Italian, but the students in that class had totally different personalities.

My next step was to introduce an Italian game and I hoped it would be more successful.

The Fourth Task

We had already looked at Italian cards and they were keen to learn a "real Italian game". I showed them *Sette e Mezzo* (Seven and a half). It is very like Blackjack or 21. The object of the game is to get cards that add up to 7 and a half. The dealer has an important role as he/she has to ask each player if they would like a card.

I played a demonstration game with a student and gave the students a sheet with the rules. We talked about words we needed and put them up on the board. Students were then asked get into groups and collect their packs of cards. In this lesson students practised the game. In the next lesson a new element was added – betting. Students were given four Smarties™ each with which to bet. Apart from the language associated with betting students now needed to add colours to their vocabulary in order to bet. Students would forfeit turns and Smarties™ if English was used.

Students now had a lot more to concentrate on in order to play. They had a new game with different rules, they had to add up their score, they had to work out whether they needed more cards and they had to remember colours in order to bet. As far as the language was concerned they had to be

listening in order to be able to ask for a card or to say stop and they had to try to show their final score at the end.

These lessons were repeated in the following term 6 weeks later. This time the students were videotaped.

Results

In the first lesson there was an element of chaos as students tried to remember the rules. Students were more focussed in the second lesson however and enjoyed the game and seemed to be really trying to use the language.

The sweets as an incentive were also a success. As the sweets were also the betting currency they were very good props for encouraging students to use a little more Italian.

Students were fine while they were using the familiar language *Un'altra carta?* (Another card?) and *Si* or *No*. The main phrases had been put onto a large cardboard chart as a prompt but not many students needed it. What they did need was a prompt sheet (at first) for the colours!

On the video of the subsequent lessons there was an interesting outcome, which echoed that which arose when students were playing "Guess Who?". This was that students were fine with the phrases discussed and rehearsed but became lost in closing and opening the game or in fact in producing any conversation other than that which was directly associated with the game itself.

However, as in "Guess Who?" there were some students who were able to manipulate expressions to give real meaning to their exchanges. One particular example was in a group of girls who always worked on the tasks to the best of their abilities. They were fine with the main part of the game, but when the game came to a close the dealer was unsure how to finish the game so she continued to ask players if they wanted more cards. She asked one student in particular who answered with *Basta!* (Enough). At first she did this politely but the dealer kept asking the same question over and over. The girl kept giving the answer politely. This happened about 3 to 4 times. Eventually the girl in frustration raised her hands and gesturing strongly shouted *Basta! Basta! Basta!*. She had certainly discovered a socioculturally appropriate way of using this word!

Other students became very good at mime and one group played an entire game almost in silence except for the dealer's asking for cards. This

was still a step forward because in order to mime a correct answer the question had to be understood. Students did also develop a shortened form of the dialogue which made it sound more "natural". They quickly dropped "I would like to bet red or blue." to simply "Blue" or "Red". I belive that this was a very positive outcome as it showed they were using and manipulating the language.

Discussion

From these activities there emerged a number of issues relevant to the primary LOTE classroom.

Firstly, that it is important to reassess activities and to adapt them to suit the character of the learner and the dynamics of the group. The first card game of "Cheat" was not challenging enough for this group. Also because it was something with which these students were too familiar they were not interested in really being involved. Once these problems were highlighted I was able to modify certain aspects of the classroom management. I introduced a new game in order to achieve what I had set out to do, which was to have students interacting and trying to maintain conversation in Italian.

As well as reassessing the suitability of the activity for the learner it is important to persevere with classroom management techniques. This is in order to provide enough discipline in the room to allow students to give the activity "a fair go". Once the discipline is "practised" students will be able to try more difficult tasks and not rely totally on teacher control.

From the way the students reacted to the activities, it is clear to me that beginners need structured ways to help them interact with each other. This is not really a new discovery but one that is always important to bear in mind.

The students did begin to be comfortable with manipulating well-known phrases and so gradually gained ownership over the language they were using. This seems to have been the case because the students were using language in a real situation that interested them, in this case playing cards. The card playing while it was seen as "an activity" was also seen as something that had a goal - to win the lollies. In its simplest form it was using language for a definite purpose.

> ... following the rules of the game is necessary to give structure to the encounter, but each side is playing to win and not simply to demonstrate how the game should be played.
>
> (Di Pietro 1987: 11)

In playing cards students are not just trying to play, they want to win and therefore need to use language for that purpose.

The students' having enough confidence with and understanding of the language to be able to eliminate unnecessary phrases such as "I would like to bet" and to use just the colour word instead was a very positive outcome. It showed that students were developing some ownership of what they were saying and not merely repeating set phrases.

The students did become unstuck as they had done in "Guess Who?" because they would arrive at a point in their language knowledge where they really could say nothing unless they said it in English. There were some who chose to say nothing, while others used mime. In a writing task it is possible to stop to consult dictionaries but this is not possible in a game. The "missing words" tended to be fillers and small phrases such as "Wait!", "Let me see", "I think I have enough" and so on. These simple expressions are the kind that a native speaker knows and can use in many situations. For students in 30 minute lessons it is very difficult to pick up fillers and gambits. This is to me the most important problem that became apparent from the research. How do students get the opportunity to add those parts of a conversation that keep it going? Kasper discusses one solution to this:

> As much as possible, such student-centred activities should be based on authentic native speaker input, brought into the classroom through audio-visual media.
>
> (Kasper in press: 20)

The situation is also summed up in the ALL Guidelines

> Learners [do not spend] enough time gaining access to further data from fluent background speakers that will serve to extend their communicative capacity.
>
> (Scarino et al. 1988: 21)

While one might question how students are to gain this access and ask what is the definition of a fluent background speaker, this statement points to an unexpected outcome from this project. That is, that it is not enough to just teach useful formulaic expressions. Students also need to be exposed to many examples of people their own age interacting in a natural context in order to pick up the fillers and extras that carry conversation and give it a "natural feel". This observation became apparent because the card playing activity is a social activity as well. It is language being used for a purpose. What the students do not have access to is watching or listening to

real children playing a real game of cards in Italian. The "audio-visual material" that Kasper speaks about is sadly lacking for the primary sector.

It would be ideal to try to observe Italian children playing, note what they do and reproduce it in some way. In this way students could really throw them selves into the part.

In the meantime I feel the activities have been a qualified success in that they did have the students speaking happily, albeit briefly, to each other in Italian. When they could not use the Italian they tried to other strategies to further their communication. Some students were able to manipulate language to make themselves understood. What the students and I need to do next time is to keep brainstorming more phrases and words that we feel could make the conversation just a little more interesting. I will use the video of the previous lessons for this too so that they can see how the gaps make the conversation flow stop. This might also help them work out some of the words they might need.

Conclusion

Using social activities such as playing cards in the LOTE classroom does give students the opportunity to speak to each other in the LOTE. The card games in the Italian classroom on the whole worked well once we used a traditional Italian game. Students enjoyed the challenge of a new game. They used more language during the lesson because they were encouraged to do so and because they had a purpose to use it. In this case the purpose was to play the game and to try to win.

The students were relaxed. The socialising was important because socialising in a different language for many students is not a part of their lives. They could also appreciate the role that card playing has in another country, and the betting in particular made it more natural and culturally appropriate.

However the conversation was still very formulaic and when students did not know what to say they were not able to do anything except use English or mime. This would be what anyone in a foreign country with no knowledge of the language would do. They lacked the conversational fillers that are natural to the native speaker and could not sustain a conversation as such.

This was just the first step. Now comes the challenge of building up more language so that the students can say a little more. It will also be important to try to locate some authentic material, preferably on video so that the students can observe the language and mannerisms of the children. For

students to be in contact with native speakers would be the ideal but in this situation it is not very practical.

What is important is that social games can provide an opportunity for experimentation and risk taking with the LOTE. These goals are summarised in the LOTE Platform in the ACT LOTE Framework: "encourage LOTE learners to explore, experiment and take risks where appropriate" (ACT Department of Education and Training 1994: 10)

Taking the risks in a supported and non-threatening environment that is created in activities such as card playing can encourage students to think about the language that they need. The activity can also give them the opportunity to use that language with each other.

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Evaluating information gap activities for profiling oral interaction skills

Fiona Arthur

Introduction

In this paper I describe a case study I have undertaken into information gap activities based on predictable situations with simple props that involve minimal or no target language. These activities include the Guess Who Game and a Time information gap activity taken from Harrap's Communication Games (Hatfield 1981: 58). The question is whether these tasks are effective tasks for establishing that a student is working at level three of the LOTE Profile for Australian Schools (Australian Education Foundation 1994). This type of task was described by a group of teachers involved in a Modern Language Teachers' Association (MLTA) project for National Professional Development Program (NPDP) in 1995 as being a task suitable for collecting level three Oral Interaction samples.

The MLTA NPDP 1995 Project is gathering and annotating a set of video samples to support the Oral Interaction Strand of the LOTE Profile [1]. A set of samples covering the eight levels of the Profile is to be collected for each of the main languages taught in the ACT: Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. Each language specific video will be accompanied by written annotations on each sample and Guidelines on the Oral Interaction Strand (see Liddicoat 1997 for an evaluation of the project).

There are fifteen teachers involved in the project who will complete the annotating process. These teachers work in language specific groups and then come together to ensure they have a common understanding. There have

been three days in which they have come together as a group. Before they began collecting the oral samples, they met to brainstorm a list of activities that would be likely to elicit Oral Interaction samples for each of the levels of the Profile. It was at this brainstorming session that the "information gap activities based on predictable situations with simple props that involve minimal or no target language" were seen as one of the possible activities for level three Oral Interaction.

The primary role of the NPDP project was to gather samples. The teachers involved in the project decided that an essential starting point would be to create a list of possible activities/ tasks for each of the levels of the Profile. This step was seen as essential both to support teachers in gathering the samples and to begin to understand the outcome statements and pointers of the Oral Interaction Strand. Unlike the Writing and Reading and Responding Strands there are no work samples at all for Oral Interaction in the LOTE Profile.

This case study is in effect evaluating the level of difficulty of one of the tasks identified by the project teachers against the LOTE Profile. It would be ideal to undertake this type of evaluation for each of the tasks identified by the MLTA project. This sort of analysis may contribute towards assessing the validity of the sequencing of the Oral Interaction levels of the LOTE Profile.

The LOTE Profile is a measurement tool which sets out outcome statements and pointers in a sequence for eight levels. The LOTE Profile can be likened to "relevant grading and sequencing criteria" (Long and Crookes 1992: 47). Long and Crookes in their paper on Three Approaches to Task-based Syllabus Design admit that while the "*selection* of tasks is relatively straightforward. Assessing task difficulty and sequencing pedagogic tasks are more problematic" (Long and Crookes 1992: 46). The assessment of the difficulty of the task in this study has been done by the project teachers. They used the LOTE Profile as a sequencing tool which they used to determine the relative difficulty of each level and then chose tasks/actives to suit each level. This case study evaluaties whether the teachers intuitive assessment that simple information gap tasks are effective level three tasks is correct.

This case study will also raise issues about the use of information gap activities in the classroom. Much research has been carried out on the nature of task design, and the teaching and learning strategies employed by teachers to determine what sort of impact this has on language acquisition. Long, for example, has indicated that closed, two way tasks will facilitate more

learning. These tasks will elicit "more topic and language recycling, more feedback, more incorporation, more rephrasing, more precision and so on" (Long and Crookes 1992:45). The information gap activities in this case study are 'closed two way tasks'.

Long and Crookes go on to argue that the *synthetic* syllabus types, which break language into parts and sequences of difficulty have no basis in what is actually learnt by students or 'student language acquisition' and that they rely on a theory that learners have an assumed ability to learn language in parts and also that they can integrate, or synthesise, the pieces when the time comes to use them for communicative purposes. (Long and Crookes 1992: 28). They argue that a synthetic syllabus often has the unreal expectation that students will produce near native language and they feel that this expectation does not account for students' developmental language learning stages and interlanguage. They argue for syllabus design around tasks.

The theoretical perspective which supports the use of communication tasks/ activities is based on the premise that language is best learned through interaction (Pica et al 1993:1). According to Pica "classroom opportunities to perceive, comprehend, and ultimately internalize L2 words, forms, structures are believed to be most abundant during activities in which learners and their interlocutors....can exchange information and communicate ideas. Such activities are structured so that learners will talk, not for the sake of producing language ...but as a means of sharing ideas and opinions, collaborating towards a single goal, or competing to achieve individual goals" (Pica et al 1993: 1). She further adds that this is particularly so when students "negotiate toward mutual comprehension of each other's meaning" (Pica et al 1993: 3).

Method

This case study has been focussed around the teachers in the MLTA NPDP Project. As the researcher in this case study I do not have direct access to schools because I work in the Central Office of the Department of Education; as a member of the project team however I work closely with the other teachers in the project.

The data collected for the case study has been the video samples collected in 1995 for Italian and interviews with the teachers involved in the project. This case study had primarily a focus on the Italian samples. The

study also involved questioning the French teachers about whether the information gap task was an effective task for reflecting level three student performance.

The collection of Italian samples for the NPDP project reflected what the teachers believed would reveal student performances relevant to different levels of the Oral Interaction Strand of the Profile. The teachers set up activities that they knew students could perform for the video camera. A second consideration was that samples of a range of different activities be included. Only one teacher gave some consideration to ensuring information gap activities were collected as samples.

As a consequence there were really only two items which appear to be an information gap activity. A Time information gap activity and the Guess Who Game. Both are two way activities where each student needs to get information from the other student to complete their own information. Information gap activities according to the Australian Language Levels Guidelines Professional Development Manual may be "*one-way* or *two-way* tasks. A one way task is a pair-work activity in which one participant has all the information, and the other none,(thus information flow is one-way); in a two-way task, each participant has an incomplete set of information, and each therefore needs information from the other (the flow of information therefore needs to be two-way). Such activities are particularly successful since they frequently simulate real-life situations, eg. jigsaw activities where individual learners have only part of the total picture but must come together to create the whole" (Scarino et al. 1992: 154).

The method therefore involved the selection of two information gap activities from the Italian video work samples gathered in 1995 for the MLTA NPDP 1995 project.

The video samples for the first activity included a number of samples of pairs of Year 4 students playing the Guess Who Game. The Italian teacher and myself have picked one sample of students to use as a sample for the project. The sample included a group of six students playing Guess Who, only two of the students were talking however, one student on each side. The reason for the selection included details such as the clarity of the sound, the lack of disrupting noises and the quantity of language spoken by the students. We decided that the sample had one student whose language was at level three and a second student whose language was at level two.

The three video samples for the second activity were of three pairs of students working on a Time information gap. These students varied in age; the first two pairs were Year 10 students and the third pair were Year 8

students. The language produced in the first two samples was initially at Level three, then later in the excerpts one of the students (who was present in both samples) produced some level five language. The third sample which was very short showed level three language.

In addition to the cvollection of samples, I interviewed the Italian Teacher of the students who had been videotaped. This teacher has worked with me in annotating the samples. As explained I also interviewed three French teachers involved in the project. Finally my colleague and I analysed the samples against the LOTE Profile and the MLTA NPDP 1995 Draft Guidelines. The guidelines are based on the project teachers' opinions of the key points to look for each level.

The first activity is the Guess Who Game. Initially I was concerned about the Guess Who Game because I didn't feel it fitted with my concept of information gap activities. Then I realised it was no different from the simple information gap pictures that involve two lots of drawings of people with different colour hair, eyes, large or small noses or eyes, wearing or not wearing hats or glasses and where one picture is for Student A and the second for Student B. In both this game and the typical information gap each student has to receive information from the other student to complete their task. It is a closed two-way task.

The second activity is a typical information gap activity involving students with a two different sheets with clock faces with times for various cities around the world. Student A requires information from Student B to complete his sheet and Student B requires information from Student A to complete her sheet. Again it is a closed two-way task.

Results and discussion

In the Guess Who Game the language used by one student we decided was at level two and the language used by the other student we decided was at level three. The language involved in the sample is as follows:

Student A:	Q	Ha i capelli neri?	(Does (the person) have black hair?)
Student B:	A	No	(No)
Student B:	Q	Porta gli ochiali?	(Is (the person) wearing glasses?)

Student A:	A	No	(No)
Student A:	Q	Ha i baffi?	(Does (the person) have a mustache?)
Student B:	A	Si	(Yes)
Student B:	Q	Ha i capelli rossi?	(Does (the person) have red hair?)
Student A:	A	No	(No)
Student A:	Q	Porta gli ochiali?	(Is (the person) wearing glasses?)
Student B:	A	No	(No)
Student B:	Q	E Peter?	(Is it Peter?)
Student A:	Q	No	(No)
Student A:	Q	Ha i capelli bianchi?	(Does (the person) have white hair?)
Student B:	A	Si	(Yes)
Student B:	Q	Ha i capelli bianchi?	(Does (the person) have white hair?)
Student A:	A	No	(No)
Student A:	Q	Ha il naso piccolo?	(Does (the person) have a little nose?)
Student B:	A	Si	(Yes)
Student B:	Q	E George?	(Is it George?)
Student A:	A	Si	(Yes)

Q = Question A = Answer

We decided Student A was at level three because she was producing this language confidently by herself. She was "interact(ing) in predictable social and learning situations, incorporating new language items into well-rehearsed language patterns" (LOTE Profile 1994: 33) and she was "ask(ing) and respond(ing) to simple questions" (LOTE Profile 1994: 33). In this unrehearsed situation she was able to produce the very well-rehearsed language pattern and the new language item to produce the questions about the facial features or hair colour she needed (MLTA NPDP 1995 draft guidelines: level three). Student B was unable to produce the structures himself and could only select the patterns from his written out prompts of the possible combinations. We decided he was at level two because he needed to check his prompt sheet before asking any of the questions, he needed the support of the written words before attempting to produce them (MLTA NPDP 1995 draft guidelines: level two).

In the second activity the language used by the students in part of the first and third samples and part of sample two we decided was at level three. The language involved in these samples revealed the students are able to produce the very well-rehearsed language patterns and the new language items to produce the questions and answers about time (MLTA NPDP 1995 draft guidelines: level three). Students in all three samples had not rehearsed the situation and were able to produce these questions and answers with little difficulty. The questions and answers are very simple but because they were completely unrehearsed we decided it was level three. The following questions and answers were repeated in each of the three samples in a different order.

Student A:	Q	Che ore è a New York?	(What time is it in New York?)
Student B:	A:	Nove mezzo	(Nine thirty)
Student B:	Q	Che ore sono in Tokyo?	(What time is it in Tokyo?)
Student A:	A	Sono le otto e un quarto	(It is a quarter past eight)
Student A:	Q	Che ore è a Rio?	(What time is it in Rio?)
Student B:	A	Otto mezzo	(Eight thirty)
Student B:	Q	Che ore sono a Londra?	(What time is it in London?)
Student A:	A	Sono le undici e un quarto	(It is a quarter past eleven)

Q = Question A = Answer

Sample two involved language which we decided was at level four.

Student A:	Q	Che ore è a Tokyo?	(What time is it in Tokyo?)
Student B:	A	Sono le dodici e mezzo	(It is twelve thirty)
Student A:	S	Io ho otto e un quarto	(I have a quarter past eight)
Student B:	S	Ma com' è?	(How come?
		Sono dieci ore	they are ten hours....)
Student A:	S	C' è un aproblema	(There is a problem
		... Molto problema!	... big problems!)
Student B:	S	Sì, gìa!	(Yes, by Jove!)
Student A:	S	Perchè Sydney è un ora	(Sydney is an hour in front of
		avanti aTokyo, ...	Tokyo, ...
		è nove e un quarto avanti	is nine and a quarter hours in
		a Sydney	front of Sydney)
Student B:	S	Io ho un orae mezzo	(I have an hour and a half, ...
		C' è un' altra problema!	there's another problem!)
Student B:	Q	Che ore sono a Londra?	(What time is it in London?)

Student A:	A	Undici e un quarto	(A quarter past eleven)
Student A:	S	Cosi è ....Perchè Londra è dieci ore indietro di Sydney, e Sydney è nove e un quarto ore... It doesn't work!	(So it is....because London is ten hours behind Sydney , and Sydney is nine and quarter.....)

Q = Question A = Answer S = Statement

Something was wrong with the information gap and both the students had conflicting information. This led to the students trying to explain to each other their mistakes (MLTA NPDP 1995 draft guidelines: level four). The students were able to produce their own spontaneous responses in a familiar situation (MLTA NPDP 1995 draft guidelines: level four). Although the responses were attempting to resolve the situation very spontaneously the language used was relatively simple.

The two simple information gap activities did appear to be effective tasks for producing level three language- on the condition that the task was unrehearsed, and that the students did not have any Italian language notes to prompt them. The two year eight students in the Time information gap activity sample three, demonstrated level three language although one of the students appeared a very reluctant performer. If the students had more than level three language then the task (if presented correctly) would only elicit level three language. In fact in sample one of the Time activity one of the students was also Student A in the second sample: in the first sample she only displayed level three language, whereas in sample two she displayed level four language; no mistake appeared to confuse the pair in the first sample and gave them no opportunity to complain. By coincidence the second Time sample had a mistake which meant that the two students involved in that sample with language ability greater than level three found themselves explaining the mistake and therefore demonstrating level four language.

In effect the two activities fulfilled the requirements of activities defined by Pica et al. (1993). Both types of activities and all of the samples used for the study are activities which have an end goal for the participants to achieve and the activities were being carried out by the participants themselves. The activities were not pre-prepared by the students; the students were taking an active role in carrying out the activity (Pica et al 1993: 1). Secondly the two types of activities involved a "two way flow of request and suppliance characteristic of the jigsaw task" which "better satisfy conditions

for learners' comprehension, feedback, and interlanguage modification" (Pica et al 1993:3).

In Harrap's Communication Games the activities are described "as *communicative games,* as distinct from *linguistic games*; that is, they are activities with a non-linguistic goal or aim. Successful completion of a game will involve the carrying out of a task such as drawing in a route on a map, filling in a chart, or finding two matching pictures, rather than the correct production of a structure. However, in order to carry out this task it will be necessary to use language, and by careful construction of the task it will be possible to specify in advance exactly what language will be required" (Hatfield 1981: 4). The author also emphasises that the goal in the games is on successful communication not on correctness of language. Furthermore the tasks have been designed in such a way that only a very limited knowledge of the language is necessary to complete them. "Each game is written within a specified functional area and limited to one or two structures and a clearly defined lexical field. They can be used by beginners from the very first lesson" (Hatfield 1981: 4).

As a result of interviewing my Italian teacher colleague, information gap activities were seen by her as being useful ways of getting students to practice language taught in an unstructured but meaningful way. In her opinion they were especially important to train students to have a go. She felt that information gap activities give students the opportunity to try and use the language and in effect are necessary to give them the confidence to learn to speak. She felt however that students at level two and level three have really very little language , as learners they also needed to learn strategies on how to sustain a conversation.

My colleague suggested that students needed to be taught 'fillers', ways of hesitating, of encouraging the other speaker, of changing statements into a questions, of avoid a question by changing the topic etc. I believe it is also important that the conversation strategies are appropriate to the age and interest of the students. For instance they may be interested in Bart Simpson type expressions, slang or even low level swear words. If this is the case then these along with the more common fillers for that language need to be taught.

The Italian teacher would not use the time information gap activity with primary aged students; that type of information gap she reserved for high school aged students. She would regularly use information gap activities for high school students from Harrap's Communication Games; she has used the party scene, my favourite home, spiders and the shopping list. We felt

all of these information gap activities would be effective for producing level three language in students.

With younger students or primary aged students the Italian teacher preferred to use games with an element of competition. For instance with Year Four she always uses the *Guess Who* game at the end of classes or as a reward for students who have finished their work. She found students would happily play the game again and again. Other games she would use regularly were card games, although they do not really involve much language other than numbers students do enjoy them. She described other information type games which she would use that were closed one-way information gap activities with the whole class. Again her motivation appeared to be enjoyment and short revision of items such as specific vocabulary and numbers.

Conclusion

In conclusion this study, within the constraints indicated, found that simple information gap activities with props that did not include extensive language prompts along the lines of those presented in Harrap's Communication Games, were effective tasks for determining level three performance on the Oral Interaction Strand.

As was found in the MLTA 1994 NPDP the task can limit the performance of the students if the students are capable of producing language above level three (Willett 1995). It is therefore important for teachers to consider introducing into some information gap activities problems to ensure students are given the opportunity to perform to demonstrate a higher performance.

This study did not set out to analyse the incidence of activities such as information gap activities in the classroom, however the incidence in this study did lead me as a researcher to question what the incidence was. It might be of interest to teachers to analyse to what extent they are allowing students to be involved in information gap activities which allow students to be meaningfully involved in using the language.

It would also be important to consider researching the different usage of information gap activities in primary and secondary schools and what factors if any affect their use. In this study the two information gap activities used were two-way information gap activities; the primary Italian teacher referred however to the fact that she used one-way information gap activities

in her primary classes. It would be interesting to research the incidence of one-way and two-way information gap activities in the primary classroom.

Notes

1 The MLTA 1994 NPDP project involved the gathering and annotating of written samples in each of the main languages of the ACT to support the Writing Strand of the LOTE Profile.

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What factors have inhibited second language development for an "unsuccessful" language student?

Barbara Cairns

Introduction

Because of the small number of students electing to study a LOTE at secondary college, to enable a course to run, classes often combine two or more levels, creating especially demanding conditions for teaching and learning. The great disadvantage of this situation is that the teacher must divide the time available among the different groups, leading at times to resentment from some students who feel that they receive inadequate attention, and to feelings of guilt and inadequacy on the part of the teacher who is torn between the needs of the different groups. Conversely, it provides a great opportunity for students to develop independent learning skills, to assume greater responsibility for their learning and to negotiate the learning strategies to be adopted. Some students, however, find it difficult to adapt to this situation and consequently their progress may be affected.

Although this study refers to "second language development", it should be noted that it is in fact concerned with the development of LOTE, where contact with the language is almost exclusively within the classroom setting.

This study focuses on one Year 11 student in a combined Continuing French class which included Years 11 and 12 working on separate modules, as well as one other Year 12 student working at an advanced level. The

subject of the study did not seem to have made any significant progress during the first semester. To be able to identify what, if any, learning strategies had been adopted by the student and to be able to determine why they had inhibited second language development would be very useful for two reasons: firstly, to gain insights into why the student was apparently not making progress and therefore to enable appropriate remedial measures to be taken. Secondly, it should provide some insights into my classroom practices and their outcomes (as Bogdan and Biklan (1982:207) remark, "teachers view what is going on in the classroom from a very different perspective than their students") and to modify them for the benefit of future classes.

As I approached the study, I was aware that factors other than those mentioned above might very well have contributed to the situation as I perceived it, and this indeed has been borne out by examination of the data collected. Initially, however, I looked to those factors commonly seen to influence the acquisition and learning of a second language, particularly attitude and aptitude (Krashen, 1981; Lightbown and Spada, 1993).

Because any Year 11 class group includes students from a variety of backgrounds, all students newly enrolled in the Continuing French course are given a questionnaire so that I have some idea of what their language learning experience is, as well as the reasons why they have chosen the course and their expectations of it. In addition, they all attempt a grammar-based test, which provides an indication of the grammatical structures with which they are familiar and can use with varying degrees of competence and confidence. These tests provide me with a basis from which to work, tailoring input to individual needs. It also provides a basis for comparison at the end of the semester to see what progress students have made.

In the case of the student (EC) who is the subject of this study, the questionnaire revealed that she had a keen interest in languages and had experience in studying not only French, but also two other Indo-European languages as well as an Asian language. She had spent some time in the Indian sub-continent. She also stated that she had a "deep interest" in twentieth century France and wanted to be able to understand French for the career she hoped to follow and for when she travelled in the future. (This was more than a possibility, as EC has family in the British Isles and on the Continent, and plans were being made for a visit to Europe during 1993). It would seem that EC had a strong motivation, both integrative and instrumental, (Krashen 1981:22) for language acquisition and learning.

The results of a "diagnostic" test showed that the student had a poor grasp of structure and difficulty in using verbs (including common regular verbs in the present tense) appropriately. At the end of semester 1, there were still very significant difficulties in producing accurate responses although comprehension of both spoken and written French was good. In comparison with another student who had returned very similar results on the initial "diagnostic" test, EC appeared to have gained very little from the language teaching and learning activities of the first semester.

If EC was seen to be an "unsuccessful" language learner, what were the characteristics of the "good" (i. e. "successful") language learner? Ellis (1985:122) lists nine behaviours as characteristic of the "good language learner":

1. be able to respond to group dynamics of learning situations so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions;
2. seek out all opportunities to use the target language;
3. make maximum use of opportunities afforded to practice listening to and responding to speech in L2 addressed to her/him and others - this will involve attending to meaning rather to form;
4. supplement the learning that derives from direct contact with speakers of the L2 with learning derived from use of study techniques (such as making vocabulary lists) - this is likely to involve attention to form;
5. be an adolescent or an adult , rather than a young child,
6. possess sufficient analytic skills to perceive, categorise and store the linguistic features of L2, and also to monitor errors;
7. possess a strong reason for learning L2 (integrative or instrumental motivation) and also develop a strong "task motivation" (ie. respond positively to learning tasks chosen or provided);
8. be prepared to experiment by taking risks even if this makes the learner appear foolish;
9. be capable of adapting to different learning conditions.

EC certainly displayed a number of these characteristics - she responded positively to the group dynamics of the classroom, she was an adolescent and she had strong motivation - both integrative and instrumental (see above) for learning French. I hoped that examination of the data to be

collected would enable me to identify to what extent (if at all) the other characteristics were present.

Once I had decided on the focus of this project, I spoke to the student concerned, explaining that I was undertaking some research with a view to improving strategies for teaching and learning and asking for her co-operation and participation in the project. She was very positive in her response and seemed pleased to be involved.

Method

In planning the project, I decided that I needed several types of information: about the student, her study habits, learning strategies; about factors influencing the acquisition and learning of a second language; and about this particular LOTE classroom and the teaching strategies implemented. The methods of collection were:

a) observation - in my own classroom. I had intended to observe the student in other classrooms, but due to the particular circumstances of the latter part of the school year, this proved impossible to follow through. I involved another colleague in observing interaction in my classroom, but again because of disruptions to normal timetable, illness and professional commitments outside the school, this did not prove a dependable source of information.

b) semi-structured interviews with a range of people who have some experience of the situation including:

- the student herself at the beginning, during and at the end of the project;
- other students, incidentally, talking about what learning strategies worked for them, as well as recorded interviews as part of their assessment when they were encouraged to comment on the course, classroom organisation and teaching strategies;
- other teachers of EC - one interview with each of two other teachers plus an informal conversation with one other teacher;
- EC's mother, (with whom I had spoken earlier in the year) who requested an interview at the end of the year, and with whom I had a long conversation covering many aspects of EC's activities, both in school and extra-curricular.

c) diary records: keeping a diary recording regular observations of the student and the class is very difficult for a teacher who is engaged in teaching - there were so many other things competing for time, as well as the demands of my professional responsibilities which are particularly onerous towards the end of the school year. However, it was possible to keep a less systematic diary of the project in which notes on interviews as mentioned above were recorded as well as ideas relevant to the project.

Results and Discussion

From observations in my classroom, EC appeared to be quite comfortable within the group, which because of its size and the fact that my teaching strategies include a lot of group work, has developed a strong feeling of camaraderie. The class is atypical of senior languages classes in that the males outnumber females. EC is a very social person - very attractive, usually lively and out-going. She stands out as an individual, with a style of her own. She has a good accent, but is much more likely to use English when unsupervised, than French. (In support of Ellis (1985), it should be noted that those students who did use French for classroom exchanges, performed significantly better in most aspects of the course). EC is often the focus of student interaction in this group. She is aware of the shortcomings in her command of structure, but this does not (or did not, prior to being involved in this project) seem to have stimulated efforts to overcome these, nor has it discouraged her to the point of abandoning the study of French (cf. Bailey's (1983) diagram of "competitiveness and the second language learner" in Figure 1). She does not seem to experience unusual difficulty in understanding meta-linguistic explanations, but discussions with her revealed she had few strategies for following up on classwork. In one talk with me she showed some anxiety about appearing "stupid" by asking too many questions. Although her self-image does not appear to be that of a "successful" language learner, it is not clear how this anxiety has affected her learning, except to inhibit asking for further explanations in the classroom situation.

As part of encouraging students to "learn how to learn", I discuss with them the various learning styles and urge them to experiment and discover which style each finds most effective. We try to accommodate their perceived needs by incorporating a range of approaches in our classroom activities and they are encouraged to provide feedback, so raising the topic of learning strategies was not unusual when talking with EC.

Competitive Second Language Learner (2LL)
Learner perceives self on a continuum of success when compared to other 2LL's (or with expectations)
Successful Self-image
Positive rewards associated with success of L2 learning
2LL continues to participate in milieu of success
L2 learning is enhanced
Unsuccessful Self-image
Anxiety (State/Trait)
Facilitating Anxiety
Learner increases efforts to improve L2 (w/ improvement measured by comparison w/ other LL's)—i.e., learner becomes more competitive
L2 learning is enhanced
Debilitating Anxiety
2LL (temporarily or permanently) avoids contact w/ source of perceived failure
L2 learning is impaired or abandoned

Figure 1: Bailey's (1983) diagram of competitiveness and the second language learner

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EC's main research assignment submitted in Semester 1 had shown little evidence of analysis or discussion - the treatment was very superficial. Despite careful preparation with the whole group and despite a more creative assignment being set for Semester 2, the work submitted by EC was almost straight plagiarism, taken from one of the resource materials provided for reference. Her oral presentation, however, was well prepared and well executed, although the range and variety of language was restricted.

A similar pattern emerged from the unstructured interviews with other subject teachers. In science she was "very keen" but erratic, "no follow up, no reading, no analysis"; she needed to be more systematic. Because of her mannerisms, "a 60's girl", the teacher felt that she wouldn't get encouragement from her peers in the group. However, in Semester 2, she developed a working partnership with a well-organised student and this proved a good combination. Although the teacher saw her as working better in class during the second semester, the final results did not reflect this. In another teacher's perception, she was a "very beautiful girl who likes a lot of attention and thinks that looks will carry her through". This teacher judged her to be a potentially very capable student, whose superficial approach was affecting her academic achievement. Again, the standard of work was erratic - she was seen as only making an effort when she liked something. Again, she had presented an excellent oral, an interview with a person from a totalitarian regime, but had not submitted the major essay because she had not done the research. A third teacher remarked that EC had worked quietly, had "looked at me wide-eyed" but had neither indicated whether there were any problems nor sought any assistance. There had been some absences from this sequential subject - one might expect a student would need some explanation to catch up on classes missed, but no help had been requested.

In the final interview with EC, general study habits were discussed. She spoke very confidently: "I go through the (science) text, read the chapter, answer the questions do any sheets". A similar approach was used in maths. In English, she read up on the topic being studied and in History; "you have to read up". In referring to French, she said that although she sometimes found grammar difficult, she didn't like to ask too many questions: "I feel stupid". My efforts to allay similar fears in class members had obviously been singularly unsuccessful. Learning strategies consisted of completing any worksheets distributed in class and reading over notes when preparing for a test. We had earlier talked about other more active ways of revising, but these had not been adopted. When pressed to say how much time was spent on regular home study, a predictable "it depends on the workload" was the

response; when pressed further; "almost every night". We also mentioned extra-curricular activities - music and a third language class. Attendance at the latter had been "not so much this term because of the workload".

The conversation turned to conditions for home study - physical: the room, desk, privacy. From this point of view, the conditions were excellent. When asked if these had been used in Semester 1, the student revealed that she had found it very difficult to adapt to college study, to be in class groups where she did not have any particular friends. This had also affected her relationships at home, and as well as not realising the standard of work required, she had not been able to settle down to study. In second semester, these problems had to some extent been resolved. She also spoke of her interest in languages and other cultures and religions and of the extremely high regard in which she held her father who was fluent in several languages including two from the Indian sub-continent.

On the subject of classroom organisation, she raised the problem of one teacher teaching different groups simultaneously and expressed the desire for separate classes. Unfortunately, in the current environment of dwindling resources, this is not a possibility with the number of students presently enrolled in the course.

After second semester reports were received, EC's mother requested an interview to discuss the results which were poor for almost all subjects. In French there had been some improvement on the previous semester. EC had been in Europe visiting family and friends. I explained that EC had been co-operating as part of my research project. This meeting provided an opportunity to compare the information provided by the student with the parent's perceptions and to discuss whether factors outside the school environment had affected the student and if so, to what extent. EC's mother confirmed that her daughter had found adjusting to college in first semester difficult. She had been very touchy and difficult at home, had felt rather isolated and unhappy. She has a tendency to make older friends, but did not share all of the pre-occupations of this group. During second semester, she had been more settled, but still very up and down - at times with the emphasis on "down". Her relationship with both parents was, however, a very solid one. I raised the subject of her very high regard for her father, and wondered if there was perhaps an unacknowledged fear that she would never meet his expectations even if she did "pull out all stops". By holding back, one can delude oneself that "I could if I really wanted to, if I really tried". This idea had not previously been considered.

On the question of home study, perceptions were very different from those portrayed by the student herself: according to her mother, she did very little and there was no regular pattern. She is still very disorganised in spite of having done a study skills program. Although EC goes to her room, her mother doubts that very much study is accomplished given the disorder which reigns. When extra-curricular activities were mentioned, EC's mother advised that both music and the third language had been given up, theoretically to provide more time for other studies, but that this didn't seem to have made much difference. She had offered to discuss assignments with her daughter, but this offer was only taken up in one instance. It did lead to a successful outcome. She was deeply concerned for her daughter - she felt the academic results were symptomatic of an unrealistic outlook and an inability to come to terms with any study demanding rigour (eg. a well-documented essay).

As I examined the data, I noticed that there was a pattern concerning those activities - in all subjects - where EC performed well. These were those requiring an oral presentation or one where the preparation and later analysis of results were shared with another student (eg. science). EC enjoys interaction with other people, speaks well and confidently. In the L2 context , provided the topic does not require serious research and provided she uses a limited range of language, her confident and easy manner are great assets which enable her to communicate effectively. As the task set for Year 11 students was to demonstrate and get the class members to participate in doing, learning or making something, she was able to meet the criteria very well. The data also seemed to indicate a problem with analysing information, categorising it and then being able to reproduce it. This was evident in the three subjects for which most data was available: science, history and French. EC, although strongly motivated in her L2 studies, seems to lack the "analytic ability to perceive, categorise and store linguistic patterns and to monitor errors", criterion 6 in Ellis' (1985) characteristics of the "good LO". Although attitude is positive, aptitude would appear to be a factor influencing L2 development.

The data also indicated that EC had poorly developed study skills and had developed few effective learning strategies. She appeared to respond positively to the group learning situation, but as her comments revealed, she did experience some anxiety and was inhibited to some extent in requesting explanation and clarification. She was not prepared to take risks if this meant she might appear foolish, neither did she seek out all opportunities to use the language nor make the most of those opportunities afforded in the

classroom to practise listening and responding. Factors not directly connected with the L2 classroom also contributed to the relative lack of success in L2 acquisition: social and emotional factors concerned with finding one's place in the college environment and having a sympathetic network of friends outside the classroom. Some of this anxiety was undoubtedly part of the adolescent need to belong to a group while establishing one's own identity.

Information from the students about the L2 classroom - which I had endeavoured to make as non-threatening as possible - was enlightening. Most regretted the fact that the classes were combined (nothing new there!), several commented on the timing of assessment items, something I will monitor very closely in future, and at least one commented on the amount of time required out of class in relation to other subjects. One comment was particularly sobering: the student had interpreted my anxiety to provide equitable attention and instruction to all groups - sometimes quite a stressful situation - as anger directed at one group of students. Students do indeed see the classroom interactions from a different perspective! One way I intend to deal with this problem is to be quite honest with the students and to explain how I feel about the situation, emphasising the positive aspects of combined classes and enlisting their co-operation . Another is to accept that there are limits to what can be achieved in the circumstances. I can structure the teaching/learning environment and activities to offer the best learning/ acquisition opportunities possible in the circumstances. It is then up to the student to make the best use of these.

Given the factors influencing EC and her studies and the LOTE classroom in which we were operating, how can the improvement evident at the end at the end of Semester 2 be explained? Firstly, the mere fact that she had been singled out (very discreetly) to participate in the study made her feel "special". If, as one of her other teachers judged, she needed to be a centre of attention, then being part of the study would help meet this need. Secondly, following the submission of the plagiarised assignment (which shocked me and probably shocked her as it was failed), preparation for the next task (oral presentation) was very closely monitored. It did not require research but did require careful attention to both vocabulary and form (giving instructions). The terms of the task required consultation with the teacher on choice of activity, on timing of the presentation and on the preparation of an instruction sheet to include any terms specific to the activity. EC met the criteria for the successful completion of the task extremely well, although as mentioned above, she used a restricted range of language. Thirdly, the obvious success in this task may have stimulated efforts to improve (as shown

in Bailey's (1983) diagram referred to previously). Certainly, the final revision assignment - a lengthy in-class exercise requiring a variety of responses from students - was tackled quickly and finished rapidly. When first submitted, there were some written questions which indicated a confused understanding of the structures or language uses concerned. After working through the problem sections on a one-to-one basis or with one other student, EC re-did the questions (as did several other students) with much greater accuracy. Responses she had recorded on tape were creative and interesting; communication was effective despite errors in form.

Conclusion

Second language development in the case of EC seems to have been inhibited partly by a lack of aptitude, if by that term we accept Ellis' (1985) definition (see above), partly by an un-willingness to ask questions for fear of appearing stupid and partly by absence of any effective learning strategies. These factors also appear to have affected her progress in other subjects. As in all subjects there is evidence of an ability to produce excellent results, there are obviously other elements which also come into play - possibly more personal and emotional factors such as those discussed above.

In the instance of L2 development, what measures could be instigated to try to improve her learning and acquisition? Considering the trend towards improvement at the end of the academic year, continued close monitoring of her work as well as explicit instruction in gathering information and re-using it (this will benefit other areas as well) and more direct "learn how to learn" input (see below) will be implemented. Classroom practice also needs to be modified. Some mechanism is needed for finding out earlier in the year how students perceive the learning/teaching situation. This cannot be successfully achieved until a certain degree of trust has been developed between all parties, and this takes time. At the risk of losing some students, it must be explained that a successful language learning experience is a shared responsibility. Here I am referring to the problems of the combined level classroom which places special responsibilities on learners.

In this learning environment - perhaps more than in "normal" language classrooms - it is most appropriate to discuss "learning how to learn" strategies. As a result of this study, I will do more to actively promote strategies for learning how to learn, including providing information from recent research.

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Second language acquisition and its implications for teaching: Teaching word order in Indonesian

Melissa Gould

Introduction

For this study, I carried out a study on the effectiveness of teaching Indonesian word order to a class of twenty six Year 8 students. The word order I concentrated on was the placement of adjectives and possessives. At the onset of this study, the Year 8 students had had approximately thirty hours of instruction in Indonesian and had been exposed to Indonesian word order "incidentally" through an informal focus on form, but not through explicit teaching.

In Indonesian, the structure of word order for adjectives and possessives is noun + adjective (*buku biru* 'blue book'), noun + pronoun (*buku saya* 'my book'). In order to determine whether any of the students had acquired this Indonesian word order structure. I set them an open-book task where they had to translate a descriptive passage from English to Indonesian. The students had a knowledge of the vocabulary of the passage and so were able to complete the task without additional input from me. I designed the page so that it contained a large number of possessives. In order to correctly construct the sentences in the passage, the students needed a working knowledge of Indonesian word order. I assumed that the students would transfer their knowledge about English word order to the construction of the Indonesian sentences.

The results of this pre-test showed that only 8% of the students supplied correct word order in 80% of the structures, 12% of the students supplied it in 60%-80% of the structures, 19% of the students supplied it less then 50% of the time and 61% of the students were unable to supply it at all. From an analysis of the results of this pre-test, I concluded that the majority of the students had not acquired Indonesian word order for the placement of adjectives and possessives.

Whilst I based my conclusions about the students' acquisition of Indonesian word order on the frequency of its supply, I am aware that this is not an accurate indication of word order acquisition. Indeed, I found it difficult in some cases determining whether individuals had acquired the word order or not. For example, could I conclude that those students who supplied the correct word order less than fifty percent of the time had in fact acquired that word order.

Wode (1981) identified this problem when attempting to establish how often an item has to occur to be regarded as acquired. According to Wode, many researchers claim that an item must occur at least ninety percent to be regarded as having been acquired. Yet as Wode (1981:67) points out: "to be able to use an item even with as low a frequency ratio as 5%-10% requires at least some competence with respect to that item." Moreover he claims that "the acquisition of an item must be distinguished from its spread in usage." (Wode 1981:68)

The results from the pre-test indicated that 39% of the students had some knowledge of the construction of sentences containing possessives and adjectives in Indonesian, even if, for the most part, they were unable to frequently produce examples of it. Surprisingly more students than I expected were able to use Indonesian word order correctly even though I had not taught it formally in class. On the other hand, however, it is interesting to note that only a small percentage of the students had, in fact, acquired a working knowledge of word order through limited exposure to the structure. 61% of the students could not supply examples of this structure at all. This would appear to have implications for "naturalistic" language teaching methodology such as that proposed by Krashen (1985), where there is absolutely no focus on form and yet an assumption that the learners will acquire grammatical structures and forms by "osmosis". Indeed research studies have revealed that exposure to comprehensible input without a focus on form is not enough to "bring learners to mastery levels of performance in their second language." (Lightbown and Spada 1993:91)

Teaching word order

For the purpose of this study, I chose to provide the students with formal instruction on the placement of adjectives and possessives in Indonesian whilst I was aware that the students were at varying stages in their acquisition of this structure. Indeed, I decided that it would be useful as Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 41) suggest to "focus on the emergence of structures rather than their mastery. " The results of the pre-test were very useful in providing me with a reference point of the extent to which the students had acquired word order. Moreover, it is also revealed what the students had not acquired and what they were acquiring researchers of SLA wish to know. (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:40) Indeed, I found it particularly useful to see that the students were at various stages in their acquisition process of this structure.

In order to teach the students word order, I selected a variety of stimulating and interactive tasks. According to Comeau (1987:57), "an interactive grammar exercise puts communication on a par with correctness, turning the study of grammar into a social activity." I was keen to ensure that the activities I designed were purposeful and appealed to the students' interest so as to increase the likelihood of language acquisition.

For the first task, I selected an authentic text from an Indonesian teenage magazine. The text I chose was a personal profile of an Indonesian fashion model approximately the same age as the students. I used an authentic text as I considered that the language contained in it would help the students "use the new language themselves" (Melvin et al, 1 987).

The students had a knowledge of most of the vocabulary contained in this profile and so I assumed they would not be overwhelmed by the text. I wanted to draw the students' attention to lexical items in the text that they understood and from there analyse the grammatical structure of the text and compare it to English. I also wanted to ensure that the instruction I provided was explicit, carefully controlled and repeated sufficient times in order to allow the students sufficient opportunity to learn the structure. I was aware that studies conducted by Pienemann and by Doughty had been successful because of these variables whereas those conducted by Ellis had not. (Lightbown and Spada 1993:96).

I instructed the students to work in pairs to determine the meaning of the personal data and the summary I had written of the text. I provided the students with a framework of how to analyse the structure of the language. The students then worked in small groups to determine a rule for the placement of the Indonesian word order of possessives and adjectives.

After this, I returned the students' corrected translations so that they could see the errors they had made without any formal instruction of Indonesian word order. On evaluation of this task, I decided that a better way to facilitate the learning of word order in this initial phase would be to ask the students to correct their own work with another member of the class, rather than returning work that had already been corrected. I suggest that involving the students more in their own learning would provide them with a better chance of understanding and acquiring the structure of Indonesian word order.

For the next exercise, I provided the students with an additional profile of an Indonesian model for whom they created a written summary. After checking the students' work, it was clear that most of them had a greater understanding of word order as over sixty percent of the students supplied the correct word order forms for over eighty percent of the structures.

In order to reinforce the students' use of' Indonesian word order, I set up a speaking activity where the students had to focus on this structure in an interactive way. Each student received part of the profile of an Indonesian fashion model. In order to complete the whole picture of this person, the students had to ask other members of the class for relevant information. For example, "What is X's favourite food?", "What is X's favourite hobby?" Even though this exercise did not lend itself to the students creating their own examples of word order, it reinforced the structure of Indonesian word order and enhanced interaction. According to Comeau (1987:58) this is the ideal situation for students to learn grammar naturally.

The next exercise was also a speaking exercise and required the students to describe family members. For this task, I selected four students to form a family. These students had to decide which family member they would represent and the rest of the class had twenty questions to guess who was who by using interrogatives focusing on word order. For example "Is mother's hair brown.?" "Is father's nose big?". I designed this as a whole class exercise so that I could monitor the students' word order and correct it when necessary.

After this, the students had to complete a family shield describing the characteristics, likes and dislikes of members of an imaginary family. This provided the students with an opportunity to consolidate and demonstrate their use of word order. On the whole, most of the students could supply the correct word order in this exercise, although only thirty two percent could do so for more than 90% of the time.

As experiments have established the fact that teachability constraints do not include the written language, (Pienemann, 1994:12) I considered that it was necessary to devise a task where the students used the language spontaneously in spoken form. As a result, in order to test whether the students had learned the word order rule, I set them a task of choosing a famous identity from a magazine and writing a descriptive passage for a "Who am I" activity to be played by the class during the following lesson. The students were instructed to write as much as they could about this personality including such information as their physical characteristics, personality and likes and dislikes. I did not remind the students to use the correct word order as I wanted to see whether they had a working knowledge of it without focusing on it.

An analysis of these passages indicated that most of the students had a sound grasp of Indonesian word order as only 22% of the students made any word order errors. Nevertheless, when the students played the "Who am I?" activity, it became clear that not all of the students could reproduce the same structures in spoken form. For this activity, the students were not allowed to refer to their books and so the language they used was not well-rehearsed and therefore more indicative of their level of acquisition.

In order to check this, I designed a cooperative learning activity where the students were required to use Indonesian spontaneously. Each student received different information about family members. They had to memorise this and then in groups share their information in order to draw a family tree. Whilst this activity provided the students with an avenue to communicate with other class members, it was difficult to assess correct word order usage as many of the students had memorised the information off by heart and merely reproduced it rather than taking risks with new language.

As a result, I set the students another speaking activity where in pairs they had to describe different family members in order to name all the members of a family tree. As I circulated around the class, I observed that many students were still making word order mistakes even though they were conveying meaning. As I was unable to assess all of the students during this activity, I set one final task before drawing any conclusions about the acquisition of Indonesian word order. This was also a speaking activity where the students had to match several characteristics about family members with a picture by sharing information about them with other members of the class. Similarly, many of the students did not use the correct word order structure. Overall, only twenty eight percent of the students demonstrated the correct use of Indonesian word order, despite the formal, rich and varied input they

had received and the opportunity they had to practice this in an interactive and purposeful way for approximately six and a half hours over a period of four weeks.

Evaluation

The results of the amount of Year 8 students (72%) who could not reproduce Indonesian word order spontaneously are, indeed, quite staggering. I had expected that a small percentage of the students may not be ready to acquire Indonesian word order but had not anticipated that there would be such an overwhelming number. Moreover, I was surprised that some of the students who had supplied correct word order structures in the pre-test activity were unable to do so spontaneously in spoken form for the post-test. It appears that most of the students were only able to demonstrate correct word order in written form when they were able to review and think about the structures before using them.

I planned my lessons in order to provide the students with ample opportunities to focus on the structure of Indonesian word order in a formal way and to consolidate this by completing a series of sequenced exercises and activities. I also made an effort to ensure that the material I chose was varied and stimulating and involved the students in an interactive way. I assumed that by planning my lessons in this way it would enhance the speed and accuracy of the students' learning. As a result, I expected that most of them would acquire the structure of Indonesian word order, whether they were ready to or not.

However, "strategies constrain what is comprehensible, and so learnable at any time, and hence, what is teachable" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:272) So, even though I provided the students with several opportunities to practise, revise and consolidate word order, it seems that teaching this structure to three quarters of them was futile as they clearly were not ready to acquire this structure. Furthermore, Pienemann (1994:4) suggests that practice does not make perfect. "While practice is absolutely necessary to achieve a certain level of skill in the use of the language, it does not necessarily guarantee that the skill will be acquired." In addition, the results from empirical studies (Pienemann 1994:12) indicate that "it is not possible for learners to skip stages of acquisition". Nevertheless, 28% of the students did acquire word order and so it would appear that there weren't any constraints on the learnability of this structure for them.

From the study I conducted with the Year 8 students, it was evident that the majority of the students were not ready to learn word order for the placement of possessives and adjectives. Thus the acquisition of word order must come at a later stage in the language development of these students. By introducing the students to word order, I was unwittingly expecting many of them to skip a stage of acquisition. It would be interesting to carry out a further study with more advanced students In Years 9 and 10 to determine whether they are ready to acquire the word order rule or not.

According to results of research studies carried out by Pienemann, if word order had been next on the developmental scale for these students, it would have increased their potential to acquire this structure. "Teaching a structure when a learner is ready for it does speed up the acquisition process." (Pienemann 1994:12) Indeed, this word order structure may have been part of the next stage for the twenty eight percent of the Year 8 students who could supply the correct use of word order more than ninety percent of the time. Thus by exposing this structure to them when I did could have enhanced the rate to which these students acquired the structure.

It is interesting to note that those students who were able to produce the Indonesian word order correctly often tended to incorrectly over-apply the rules of this structure to other sentence construction. Previously, I would have been tempted to regard these errors as the students' inability to correctly apply the rules governing Indonesian word order. However, since commencing this study I have learnt that these errors could actually be signs of developmental and creative language use. For example a learner who shows a regular past tense -ed ending by using "goed" or "wented" may be at a higher level from someone who says "went" and had learnt the irregular past as a "chunk" and has not acquired -ed. Thus whilst a number of students were overgeneralising the structure of Indonesian word order of possessives and adjectives to placement of verbs, this could in fact indicate that these learners were in the process of acquiring the word order structure. This would indicate that these students had indeed acquired this structure as they were taking risks with the language by producing incorrect structures according to the word order rule.

The fact that such a large amount of the Year 8 students did not acquire word order has clear implications for syllabus construction. When designing the Year 7-10 Indonesian syllabus at my high school, I graded the syntactic items according to the perception I held of the learners' ability to acquire them. This perception was based on a number of factors including the sequence in which various text books presented these items and the level

of difficulty I had perceived these items myself as a previous learner of Indonesian.

It is now clear to me that the way I graded these syntactic items was very subjective and furthermore perhaps invalid. I have always taught word order to students in Year 8, yet it appears that for a large percentage of these students it is not appropriate as they are clearly not ready for this input and so would be better off not receiving it until a later stage.

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Students' approaches to reading comprehension

Mary Nicolson

Introduction

A reading comprehension activity was undertaken with a group of Year 10 French students from Radford College, an Anglican co-educational school located in the Belconnen region of Canberra. Through structured observations, an analysis of the "bottom up" and "top down" approaches used by the students made and conclusions drawn as to their effectiveness.

Background

Silberstein describes reading as an active process where "meaning is created through the interaction of reader and text" (Silberstein 1994:7). She defines "bottom up" processing as occurring when "linguistic input from the text is mapped against the reader"s previous knowledge" and "top down" processing as occurring when "readers use prior knowledge to make predictions about the data they will find in a text" (Silberstein 1994:7). She describes the role of the teacher as creating an environment of independent, problem-solving readers who choose what to read and who practise strategies for efficient reading (Silberstein 1994:11).

In this paper, the logistics of reading as described by Dubin, Eskey and Grabe (1986: 6) including eye movement and the use of saccades, will not be discussed. Critical reading for comprehension is the focus. Goodman describes reading comprehension as being consistent with language and general

comprehension (Goodman 1988: 20). He says that what works for English reading must also work for other languages. Nutall describes comprehension in a global sense (Nutall 1982: 150) and it was not the goal of this exercise for students to provide a word for word translation of the materials presented.

Rubin talks about the importance of using authentic texts when developing reading skills, "authentic" meaning "materials written by native writers for the purpose of informing or entertaining native readers, not teaching language" (Rubin and Thompson 1994: 92). Dixon and Nessel go further by stating that not only must the materials be authentic, but they must also be "meaningful to the learner" (Dixon and Nessel 1983: 2). In this case, the material chosen was a study guide to the French revolution, used as an aid in school projects by students whose first language was French and purchased in Noumea in January 1996.

The materials were certainly "authentic" and students had previously been exposed to other authentic materials, such as magazines, before this activity. Whether or not it was meaningful to the students in their lives depends on the significance History and the French revolution holds for them. Significant "meaning" came not so much from the intrinsic value of the content but from the fact that it was something students such as themselves living in another culture, were likely to use. The level of language was relatively easy as the information was reduced to its simplest level. The written text was also supported by illustrations which proved to be of assistance.

The fact that the French Revolution was a topic included in their text book and was therefore a likely test item in the forthcoming exam provided extra motivation. Fransson would disapprove, having stated "A subject motivated by the expected test demands for which he has very limited interest is likely to adopt a surface-learning strategy, while deep-level learning seems to be the normal strategy chosen by a student motivated only by the relevance of the content of the text to his personal needs and interests" (Fransson 1984: 115). As the class was composed mostly of a group of academically oriented students and as the exam was only one week away, it could be suggested that deep-level learning was a likely outcome. The students certainly did not seem inhibited from embracing the activity wholeheartedly because it did not meet their personal needs.

The Activity

a] The Survey

Silberstein's statement "In the context of trying to encourage student autonomy, the typical instructor must also juggle the often contradictory

demands of limited time, institutionalized curricula, student expectations, and individual student needs" (Silberstein 1994: 16) was certainly true in this case. Only two fifty minute lessons could be scheduled and the way in which the timetable fell on this occasion, meant there was a gap of a week between lessons.

The first lesson commenced with an introduction to the activity in which students were informed that they were going to obtain some powerful tools for understanding texts in a foreign language. This, along with teacher modelling of strategies, were suggestions made by Rubin during a course held at the ANU in February 1995, as being a good way of introducing the teaching of strategies. To raise their metacognitive awareness and to provide data about their current strategies for comprehension, a survey found in Rubin (1989: 195-196) was conducted. As it was the middle of winter, only 17 students were present for this lesson.

In the survey, strategies considered to be effective were marked with an asterisk and as can be seen typically from the response to Question 1 (see Table 1), most students tended to choose a response that indicated they used effective strategies. When asked what they pay attention to when they read, the majority of students chose the response which indicated they paid attention to what the reading passage meant.

Other responses indicated they used strategies such as reading the whole passage once and then rereading it, depending on the passage, and reading differently according to what type of passage it was. They also reported they used structural aids such as the title of a passage and illustrations to help them guess what the passage might be about. Words they did not understand they reported as skipping but were willing to look up after first trying to guess meaning from context within the sentence and then within the passage.

Their responses to Question 3, however, indicated the main reason for reading a passage was because they had questions to answer about it or that it had been assigned. An obstacle to successful completion of comprehension questions in general in this class is that the students usually go directly to the material they think will be useful without first reading the whole passage. The idea of reading a passage for the joy of understanding what it means, had not yet entered the consciousness of the majority.

In terms of their confidence, their responses to Questions 15 and 17 indicated they generally expected what they read to make sense and for their guesses to be at least sometimes correct. Despite this there were one or two who felt frustrated at not being able to understand passages in the L2 and who tended to give up when they could not understand.

Response		A	B	C	D	E
Question	1	2	14	0	1	0
	2	7	2	1	7	0
	3	1	9	6	0	1
	4	1	6	0	10	0
	5	0	5	7	5	0
	6	3	10	3	1	0
	7	1	2	4	2	8
	8	0	12	2	3	0
	9	7	0	1	6	3
	10	1	16	0	0	0
	11	4	0	1	12	0
	12	1	5	11	1	0
	13	6	7	0	1	3
	14	9	7	0	1	0
	15	3	10	3	1	0
	16	2	11	4	0	0
	17	2	2	2	5	.6

Table 1: Questionnaire to Elicit Perceived Strategy Use Responses: Response to Question 1

b] The Rest of the Lesson

After the survey was conducted, the results were not known to the class but hopefully the students started to think about what they did when they read. The students were then given five small pieces of paper and asked to write down five facts they knew about the French revolution. This was done in order to activate their background knowledge on the subject matter and to make them feel confident that the task they were about to undertake was not too daunting. As most of them had studied the French revolution in Year 9 History, they were keen and quite knowledgeable about the topic. As Silberstein suggests "Although students learn by doing, it is important to try to guarantee students some degree of success" (Silberstein 1994:103) and Rubin and Thompson, "Familiarity with the topic will make it easier for you to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words and to compensate for gaps in your linguistic knowledge" (Rubin and Thompson 1994: 93). Of course, they were full of questions as to what they would be doing next and why they needed

to write out these facts. It was explained to them that they would be needed for a group exercise.

Nutall suggests " By dividing the class into groups you make it possible for students to help one another, and in successful groups, the interaction that takes place achieves far more than the individuals can working on their own" (Nutall 1982: 162). The groups were chosen by the students but there were not to be above four members per group. The students were told that this task was not to see who knew the most information but to show them they already knew a lot about the topic. Each member of the group brought their five pieces of paper with them. The students then grouped (their pieces of paper together and broadly categorised their information. The students were informed that there were no correct or incorrect categories for this task but they should come up with their own subheadings according to what seemed to make sense to them.

Each group completed a semantic map of the French revolution on a sheet of A3 paper provided to them. As suggested by Silberstein, "One technique that allows students to demonstrate their understanding of the relationships among ideas within a text is the drawing of semantic maps" (Silberstein 1994:49). Teacher assistance and encouragement was given to groups as the activity was undertaken. Each map was pinned on a board at the back of the classroom and at the end of the time allocated, other groups were able to inspect what their peers had written, thus refreshing and adding to their store of information.

Finally, the text was introduced to the students. They were shown the study guide and told that it had been purchased in Noumea. They were then told each group would be finding out what information there was on one page of the guide and that the group would report back to the whole class on what they were able to find out. Each group would report so that an overall picture of the events of the French revolution could be built up.

They were given very specific instructions on how to approach the task. First of all, each member of the group was instructed to read the entire passage in silence. They did not have to understand the meaning of the passage but just to get an idea of what it was about. Each group was then to look for cognates on the page they had been given and highlight them. Previously the students had done work with recognising cognates and had achieved a high degree of success using this technique. On one of the pages looked at by one group there were a total of 90 cognates out of 279 words. That is, almost one third of the words were words the students could easily guess. This did not include the French vocabulary that they had learned over the previous four years. They were also directed to look at the illustrations on the page. All of this was intended as preparation for the reading task and

to build the students' confidence in their ability to understand. This took them to the end of the first lesson.

In the second lesson, the students were given back their sheets with the highlighted cognates, and given another sheet with the passage in the middle and a column on the left hand side for stumbling blocks and another on the right hand side for how these stumbling blocks were overcome. They were told not to look in dictionaries but they could ask the teacher for the meaning of certain words if they were really stuck. At the end of twenty minutes, each group was to present the information they had gathered to the rest of the class in English and then each group completed a second semantic map which was displayed next to their first one.

Even though the grammar could have proved a stumbling block, in effect it was only the unknown words that proved difficult. This supports the suggestion of Cooper that "...practised readers showed rather clearly that, although they had weaknesses at lower grammatical levels, this did not prevent them from grasping larger meaning relationships between sentences ..." (Cooper1984: 135). In terms of how the stumbling blocks were overcome, students wrote they either skipped words or guessed what their meanings were. Needless to say, the second semantic map contained a lot more information than the first.

Discussion

There were various positive features of this exercise which will be retained for when the exercise is repeated at a future date and there are adjustments which could enhance these positive aspects.

The preparation of the students for the reading activity, which may seem lengthy, in fact could be further developed. For example, specific vocabulary contained in the text was not pre-taught, which Nutall suggests can be a good idea (Nutall 1982:157). Because dictionaries had not been extensively used previously in the classroom, their usage was not included in this activity. If they had been used previously, they may have provided invaluable assistance to the students and provided a further boost to their confidence. Even though they were able to cope without them, dictionaries certainly would have made the activity easier for them. When a follow- up piece was given in the examination, some of the specific vocabulary not known to the students and without which it would have been difficult for them to understand the passage, was included. Nutall"s suggestion of using the dictionary as a tool will certainly be taken up in the future (Nutall 1982: 79).

Other activities suggested by Ujitani (1993) could also provide some interesting alternatives which could easily be incorporated into the activity such as the one suggested by Ujitani (1993) where headings pictures and main ideas are mixed up and students have to match them correctly. This would emphasise in the student's mind the importance illustrations can play in helping comprehension.

Through observation of what the students were able to produce, using the technique of working in groups will be used again. This appears to be a case of the total being greater than the sum of the parts. The approach provided the opportunity for the teacher to give individual attention where it was needed.

As to whether or not the students used a "top down" or "bottom up" approach to comprehension, the majority of the preparation, helping each other, semantic maps etc were part of a "top down" approach. The stumbling blocks, however, came from a deficiency in vocabulary and it is certain the students would not have been able to produce the work they did without a knowledge of basic vocabulary and grammar. So both approaches were used, the distinction between the two becoming hazy at times. Neither approach would be favoured above the other if the exercise were to be repeated with another group of students but a combination of the two would be retained.

Two follow up activities, as well as the enthusiastic vocal support of students, attested to the success of this activity even though there is no empirical data to support the proposition, merely teacher observation. The first was when the students were given a difficult comprehension passage on the French revolution in their final examination. The piece was jointly chosen by the Head of Department and the classroom teacher but there were reservations that perhaps it might be too difficult.

The answers given by the students showed they were not relying merely on their knowledge of the historical facts but had made intelligent guesses based on the text. Even though stumbling blocks with unknown words occurred, a global understanding was achieved by all of them, even the weakest student.

The second time came when one of the students purchased a magazine during a recent trip to Noumea and in a relaxed conversation with the teacher, talked about what she had understood of the various articles. A small group of three had read the articles together and tried to pick out cognates and guess the meaning of unknown words with a good degree of success. The students had even paid for the magazine themselves and enjoyed their reading of it! The fact that the original comprehension topic had been the French revolution had not deterred them. They had transferred their skills seamlessly and into voluntary reading activity.

Conclusion

The students in this study used a combination of "bottom up" and "top down" techniques when approaching the comprehension of previously unseen authentic materials. Even though they were unable to apply all of the strategies in the initial task, students were able to learn from the activity and successfully apply the strategies in a test situation. A positive transfer of skills was also observed in the student's enthusiasm in reading magazines in French during their trip to Noumea. Future work on developing comprehension skills would include more teacher directed preparation in the early stages but the use of group work would be retained as it provided a valuable, supportive environment in which learning took place. Both the students and the teacher in this case, were able to benefit from a structured, confident approach to the comprehension of written materials in the L2.

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Reading activities in early childhood classes

Melanie Hobbs

Introduction

In an early childhood context a language rich environment provides access to a wealth of language materials, and an atmosphere that actively encourages and supports language attempts as well as promoting the positive aspects of literacy. We read for many purposes, Grellet, stating the main reasons as "for pleasure and for information (in order to find out something or in order to do something with the information you get)." (Grellet 1981:4).

Early childhood practioners also acknowledge that "In addition to contributing significantly to a child's language learning and aquisition of knowledge about the world, book reading also introduces some more 'technical' prerequisites to learning to read." (Goldfield and Snow 1984:211). These conventions, such as the relationship of print to sound, the left to right sequence of words on a page and pages in a book and naming of title and author, are conventions that are made explicit in teaching book mechanics in pre-school settings.

Scollen and Scollen (1979, 1980) point out that technical reading skills are just one part of "the ability to function as a literate member of a literate society. Pre-school children who have extensive pre-literacy experiences are well skilled in the mechanics of dealing with books, of orientating to print, and extracting information from pictures." Goldfield and Snow point out that even more important is their aquisition of a set of expectations about the way in which material is presented and information

is exchanged in literary and classroom settings. (Goldfield and Snow 1984: 214).

The aim of this assignment on reading is to acknowledge the importance of helping children to gain an understanding of the varying functions of different texts. I would also like to draw together issues of teaching reading in early childhood settings with reference to current theory of reading in a second language, chosen because many can be applied to pre-literacy activities in L1. At the time of writing this assignment my student group was a pre-school class, therefore interactions are in L1.

Context of this project

This assignment was planned for implementation with a group of pre-schoolers, ranging in age from 3+ to 5+ years, within a childcare environment. Many children in the target group for this reading assignment are familiar with the narrative genre of books. The pre-schoolers are constantly involved in pre-literacy activities. These may be be informal situations, such as sharing a story, writing a shopping list or reminder note, or a more purposely taught activity with a specific focus in mind, e.g. writing a big book together using the concepts of print we are familiar with. Children are also starting to produce their own story books at the writing table - some writing their own script and others using the teacher as a scribe.

This familiarity with the narrative genre and an interest in writing about shared experiences, indicated an opportunity to teach children how to recognise features of non-fiction texts and produce a piece of writing in a specific genre, in this case an information or factual text.

Painter (1986) writes that teachers need to have a clearly formulated idea as to the kind of writing which they areworking towards at any particular point in their program. Painter goes on to say that just expecting children to produce a variety of written genres , or leaving them free to do so , will simply be restricting the possibility of success with the range of texts they will encounter in school and out of school contexts.

In comparing the role of interaction in learning to speak and learning to write, Painter states that, "in order to learn to construct different text types, children need to become aware of their pupose and their structures in a way that dialogue with the adult informally 'taught' them the naming game and the genre of personal recount." (Painter 1986: 93). Children's reading and

familiarity with a range of texts provides important models for written language. Our preschool bookshelf displays a variety of narrative and factual texts, but children need to understand a genre before they are able to produce such a text themselves.

The structure of different texts types was highlighted by activities that concentrated attention on one element of structure at a time. As an initial introduction in a grouptime session I talked about two books that we have re-read several times, *Za Za's Baby Brother* by Lucy Cousins (1995) and *Underwater - A First Look At Animals* by Diane James and Sara Lynn (1992). I used the terms 'story' and 'information' books and talked about features of each text. In subsequent group sessions I asked questions related to the books we were sharing and these features were then discussed.

As a follow up activity at the writing table children wrote their own story or information books. Many children said "This is an information book about....." , or "This is a story book." It is evident from these simple texts that children were beginning to distinguish between text types.

Looking at a range of story and information books over a week the group made observations and commented on the features of each text type. We began to use the contents page to find information when looking at information books. Several key phrases were repeatedly used, e.g. "Let's look up some information on....." , and "Let's look on the contents page."

Several texts had illustrated contents pages which provided an added cue for the written text. In these grouptime sessions I modelled finding pages from the contents by counting through the pages, constantly referring back to my purpose - finding out some information.

> "Okay, what was I looking up? Let's look at the contents page again. Now, where can I find some information on.....? Okay, the contents say we have to look on page 8. Can you help me count? Page 1,2,3, any information here on.....? No? Let's keep going to page 8. Page 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Here we are! Look, information about..... It says .....at the top of the page. Let's find out all about it!"

Follow up activities

The next step was to jointly look at a big book, *Top Tasty Treats* by Diane Bates (1993), a factual text on the origins and making of popular foods. At the beginning of this session I drew attention to the visual cues provided by the front cover, acknowledging that pictures as well as the title can give clues

to text type. Grellet recognises these cues encourage students to anticipate what they are to find in the text, stating that "reading is a constant process of guessing, and what one brings to the text is often more important than what one finds in it." (Grellet 1981: 7).

By looking at the cover we could make guesses about the information inside the book and a variety of responses was encouraged. After reading through the contents page we chose to find out some information on chocolate. Using our now familiar procedure of finding the location of information from the contents, comments were added such as "Ahh, so this is how you make chocolate." "Is there any information on.....?" etc.

A small group of children looked at this book after grouptime and I recorded some of their comments. Many of these comments used the language that had been introduced in previous sessions. Their comments also demonstrated the importance of individual readers' interest as a facilitating force in the aquisition of reading.

"What number is icecream?"
"Let's look up another one." (then counted pages from contents).
"Let's see another one"
"I want to look up biscuits."
"Which one is chocolate?"
"I want Liquorice."

A sign was left on the bookshelf "Are you reading a story or an information book?" which was to promote further discussion on the types of books we look at. As many children demonstrated awareness of the features of information texts, it was time to use this knowledge to make our own factual text.

After reading *Winter Days* by Denise Burt (1988), we wrote an information book about winter with a small group of children. Using our knowledge of how a contents page works this was included as an important feature of our text. After a contents page had been devised on the basis of an understanding of winter in Australia, this small group contributed to the text and illustrated it. This book was used in a follow up grouptime where we looked up information based on the contents and text devised by the pre-schoolers.

Although this activity showed an understanding of the function of features in factual texts only a small number of children were involved in this activity. My aim was to write a book using factual text features that was

accessable to all members of the pre-school group. I decided that we would produce an information book about the children themselves when they were 'young" (one year old). The book would contain a photograph of each child in the group with a breif text underneath starting with "when I was one ...".

There were several considerations in choosing a base for this book. Carrel states that "the greater the background knowledge a reader has of a text's content area , the better the reader will comprehend that text", (Carrel 1991: 245), suggesting that teachers experiment with a number of pre-reading activities that activate student's background knowledge. The pre-school group had shown a keen interest in babies, some with younger siblings and many excursions in to the Babies' Section to help at morning tea and lunch times. We had also read *When Frank Was Four* by Alison Lester (1994) several times in storytime and it had generated a great deal of discussion. Many children had identified with the experiences of the friends in the book.

Motivation is also of great importance when reading. Grellet states that being motivated means that "we start reading the text, prepared to find a number of things in it, expecting to find answers to a number of questions and specific information or ideas we are interested in." (Grellet 1981: 18). When reading, we keep making predictions which in their turn, will be confirmed or corrected. In preschool pre-literacy helping children to use skills of prediction is an important feature. Adults can encourage these skills by modelling/thinking aloud e.g "I wonder what is going to happen next?" and encouraging a range of responses to this question. Along with textual clues, knowledge and experience help readers develop expectations about what they will read. Silberstein adds that "an efficient reader then confirms or refutes these predictions by reading." (Silberstein 1994:6).

Making a factual text that draws on information about the pre-schoolers themselves is both relevant a and meaningful activity. It can also utilise input from families and and the added cue of photos. Notes were sent to parents and care-givers requesting their assistance in providing us with photos and information for our text.

Carrell states that several researchers have felt the need to emphasize that efficient and effective second language reading requires both top-down and bottom-up strategies operating interactively (Carrell 1991: 240). This theory applies to reading in L1 also, as it was in fact developed for L1 in the fist place. It is possible to illustrate how these two methods work together in the interactive processing of the text in the context of reading the pre-schoolers' jointly constructed text.

Bottom-up features that can trigger the pre-schoolers' indentification skills such as the straightforward recognition of the lexical units and the

grammatical signals required for the simple decoding of a text can be seen to be:

- children's names (most of the pre-schoolers can identify their name and recognise some others).
- basic layout features of a factual text, i.e. contents page, cover with title and author, page numbers.
- non-textual cues- photos and children's drawings.

Those higher- level cognitive skills that allow for the meaningful reconstruction of a text as a unified, coherent structure of meaning which Carrel (1991) has referred to as interpretive skills can be seen to be:

- Familarity with common phrase "When..... was 4 ....." due to several readings of the text and subsequent discussions where pre-schoolers called on their own experiences.
- Interest in subject matter (personally relates to them).
- Information gathered from parents and caregivers.
- Reading of related texts- subject matter.
- Familiarity with information text genre through pre-reading activities.
- Knowledge and practice of how to gather cues from non text.

Features of our information text include:

- On front cover: Title and author, illustrations from children.
- Contents page with text and page numbers.
- Pages with sub-headings, text, corresponding photos, page numbers.

Discussion

Over a four week period that it took to produce and work with the book, we jointly constructed a text from a strong base of shared experience that was built up gradually over time. Over this time it became evident that the pre-schoolers had developed a sense of ownership of the text as it validated children's own experiences as well as sharing the experiences of their peers. Below I have listed the key features of this learning experience.

- The discussion of photos was both meaningful and relevant to the children and our book generated valuable discussion, enthusiasm, and a finished product that will be continually referred to.
- The features of an information book were successfully highlighted and enabled children to create their own text.

- The pre-schoolers' adoption of associated language and features in children's sharing of books and in their own writing of them.
- Pre-schoolers took the opportunity to read and explain their book to parents and other people in the pre-school. In sharing the finished book in grouptime children successfully used the contents page, textual and pictorial cues to find out information on themselves and other pre-schoolers.
- Both the title and illustrations on the front cover were decided on by the pre-schoolers, to try to give readers of their book clues to its book type and the information within it

Conclusions

This project allowed an opportunity for the joint construction of a text involving input from children, parents and teacher. Painter (1986) lists several characterstics of writing produced through interaction that can be applied to this assignment on reading. I have adapted these characteristics as they summarise the results of this reading assignment.

1. The writing and reading of the text created by the pre-schoolers was a result of a series of planned interactions based on input from children, parents and teacher.
2. Meanings were negotiated and clarified in talk, the text creating valuable exchanges between the children, between children and the teacher, and between teacher, children and parents.
3. The familiarity with the repetitive phrases in the book *When Frank Was Four*, an awareness of the features of an information book/factual text and the added cue of photos relating to personal information resulted in a strong base for the joint construction of texts, both oral and written.
4. There was therefore both spoken and written language produced in the course of the task to provide models from which the pre-schoolers could 'plagiarize' on future occasions. This was evident in their adoption of phrases from the text, "When I was one, I ..." and comments on the features of factual texts, "I want to look up about me/Sophie." when referring to the contents page.
5. The pre-schoolers were able to produce a successful written text in the correct genre as they had learned in interaction what information was to be conveyed and had been allowed the time and opportunity to gain experience, again in interaction, in how to convey the information.

6. Children showed evidence of moving from joint to solitary construction of a discourse, in their reading of the text and in 'writing' their own information books.
7. The teacher was aware of the piece of writing she wanted the children to achieve, which gave many children experience of the features and format of an information book.

The experience of writing a factual text based on information about pre-schoolers has been a very rewarding one. The pre-schoolers demonstrated their understanding of the various features of an information text and how they can use these cues to access information. I can see possibities for the adaption of this reading activity to the second language classroom, particularly suited for primary aged children. For older children it could be successfully incorporated as an activity that focuses on the use of the past tense. This reading assignment also suggests possibilities for the joint construction of the wide range of text types that children will encounter in literary and classroom settings.

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Introducing a reading strategy to ESL students

Lorna Fleetwood

Introduction

Rubin (1987) has argued that the explosion of methodologies in the late 70s and early 80s in which language teachers faced increased options in the selection of methods and materials, has been parallelled by a steadily growing interest in considering the language learning from the learner's point of view and in changing the focus in classrooms from teacher-centred to learner-centred. In particular, there has been a growing interest in defining how learners can take charge of their own learning and in clarifying how teachers can help students become more autonomous. Not all students require the same degree of assistance in achieving the goal of independent learning. Commonly, poorer students may notice that better students always have the right answer but they never discover why they have these answers and never finds out what "tricks" lead the better student to the right answer. Rather than leaving them to admire the good student and feel inferior, it is important to find out what good learners do and what strategies they use in their learning and then teach this to others. By strategies, Rubin (1975) means the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge.

Rubin has spent considerable time observing the learning processes which go on in classrooms in California and Hawaii. She has identified several strategies used by successful learners of foreign languages, among which is the emphasis placed on form. Good language learners constantly

try to find patterns in what they are learning by paying attention to the form in particular ways. This involves constantly analyzing, categorizing, and synthesizing in order to find schemes for classifying information. Learners become better at doing this if they have nmore opportunities to practice. (Rubin 1975)

Such approaches as this are used almost instinctively by some students; they have to be formally taught to others so that they too have the opportunity to become good language learners. Because these students do not naturally make use of some reading or writing strategies it is wise to adopt an informed training approach. This means that the teacher names each strategy as it is taught and explains why it is necessary for the students to know it. The goal of the teacher is to empower even the weaker students with strategies which increases opportunities for them to work independently and with growing confidence in their language abilities. One of the many reading strategies taught in this way was given the name "Identifying Word Formation" and it was introduced to overseas students at a secondary school in the ACT.

The study

This study was carried out at Radford College, an Anglican Independent Co-educational college in Canberra with an enrollment of over nine hundred secondary aged students. Although only fourteen years old, Radford is already attracting a small but steady number of overseas students each year. They come to complete Years 11 and 12, following the Australian curriculum. The students join existing Tertiary and Accredited classes. Whilst they are given considerable assistance with developing research, planning and writing skills, the fact that they are studying novels, maths and science textbooks written in English puts them at a clear disadvantage compared with their Australian peers.

Many of these students are here to gain a degree which will aid them towards a better career in their own country. Acquisition of fluent spoken and written English is a high priority in their native countries and, no doubt, plays a major part in the decision to pay a great deal of money for a foreign education. For such students, in whom much is invested, and for any E.S.L students permanently living in Australia, it is vital that they become competent readers and speakers of English if they are to make the most of

the opportunities available. Any strategy which can increase their speed of comprehension and fluency is to be commended.

The two students who were introduced to the reading strategy were both Asian, one from Japan and the other from Tawain. Both had been speaking and studying English for several years before coming to Australia. This reading strategy was of particular relevance to them because they were already able to read English reasonably although very slowly. To be able to increase their speed of reading and comprehension would make a great difference to the amount of time spent on reading and writing assignments.

The students were introduced to the reading strategy individually because it was the first time that it had been tried and so detailed observation of their reaction to it and its success were particularly important. The students were asked for permission to tape the lesson to assist with later evaluation. Such an approach is not mandatory. One could introduce the strategy equally successfully to small groups, although classes of over fifteen might be difficult to monitor adequately.

Teaching reading strategies

The first step in the procedure was to remind the students of the amount of reading which was required in order for them to cope with a senior school curriculum and how much time was involved. There was no need to dwell too long on what was painfully obvious to the students so the conversation quickly moved onto the need to increase the speed of reading and how there were certain strategies which could greatly assist in this.

The name and meaning of the strategy was now given to the students for the first time. They were told that "Identifying Word Formation" was a way of comprehending long words by breaking them up into smaller, more manageable components which were less overwhelming and possibly more easily recognizable.

Next, the students were introduced to the mechanics of using the strategy. It was suggested that the most effective way of breaking words up was to say them aloud and, at each pause, draw a pencil line. Each division of the word represented a syllable and had a different role to play in its meaning. What one had to do now was to look at and work out, the meaning of each syllable independently and then see if the sum of the individual explanations led to the comprehension of the whole word. The order in which

the syllables occured was considered was significant. The root, or part of the word which carried most of the meaning, was usually the second part in words of both two and three syllables.

Two words were now used with the students to illustrate how the strategy worked. "Seaman" was selected as a word which had two distinct and easily recognizable syllables. It was not difficult for the students to understand how the strategy broke the word up into "sea" and "man" and to decide that the word was describing a person who has a lot to do with the sea, maybe a sailor.

The second of the two words was not quite as obvious yet, nevertheless, a valuable example because of the prefix and suffix it contained. The students were shown how to break up the word "preheated" into three syllables. The root, or second part contained most of the meaning and was something to do with temperature. Next the students were asked to look at the first syllable. This was a prefix they recognized from other contexts and so they were able to understand that it meant something that was done before other things could be completed. Finally, the last part was considered. The "ed" ending was recognized as the past tense of many verbs and so the whole word was likely to be a verb. When all this information was collated the students were able to see that "preheated" meant to heat something before another action was undertaken and was a word likely to be found in cookery books.

It was made clear to the students at this point that what appeared to be a very labour intensive activity would in fact become a powerful reading strategy if it was practised frequently because it would develop into an automatic procedure. By breaking long words up into smaller components the students would be less intimidated and also more likely to recognise one or more of those parts. The students would be using information they already possessed to make sense of the new, going from the known to the unknown. Such a procedure would make the students less dependent on a teacher, who might not always be available to assist, and more confident in their own abilities. It would also make them more aware of common linguistic patterns in the English language and that would help to make a speedier use of the strategy and, consequently, achieve an increased reading speed.

It was hoped that the arguments so far given, as well as the careful explanation of how to use the strategy, were sufficient to make the students enthusiastic about its potential! The students were now given a list of about ten words and asked to say them aloud, make a pencil division at pauses and then try to work out their meaning. The students did the "thinking" aloud as

well so that the progression of their thoughts could be closely monitored. The words in the list were ones which mostly lent themselves to breaking up into discrete components and with unambiguous meanings. This was important if the students were to feel confident with the strategy and assured that it would bring beneficial results to their reading speed. Words such as "disobeyed"," newspaper", "tribesman", "greater", "recharged", and "wanted" were selected for the students on which to practice their new skills.

After the students had considered all the words in the list, it was felt appropriate to assess what had been discovered so far about the procedure and the English language so that some further guide lines for using the strategy effectively could be highlighted. At this point the students were happy to follow the procedure of studying the root or second syllable first, then the first syllable and lastly the ending. Some time was given over to discussion of the various prefixes and suffixes which form such an important part of the English language and which, if memorised, can greatly assist in the recognition of longer words.

It was now time for the students to apply the strategy without any guidance. They were given a number of sentences with particular words underlined. They had to make the divisions of the words themselves and then work out their meaning. There were six sentences which contained both easy and more difficult words. After about ten minutes they were asked to explain what the underlined words meant and the part they played in the sentences. When using the strategy by themselves the students had mixed success. Words like "classroom", which is made up of two familiar shorter words, and "prejudge", the division for which is very obvious, presented no problem. However, dividing words like "incapable" and "repeating" into three syllables, as the pauses suggested, resulted in nonsense root words. Once the correct complete root syllable was pointed out to them, the students had little difficulty in deciding the function of the other syllables in expanding the meaning of the root component.

The lesson continued with an evaluation of the reading strategy. There was a discussion of how useful it would be to the students and the problems encountered when trying to use it. Both students agreed that they had found the strategy helpful, particularly when they already recognized the root of the word and had just to identify the syllables either side of it. A list of the occasions when the strategy wouldn't be useful was also drawn up and, again, these mainly concerned the root of the word. For instance, as already referred to in the last paragraph, the breaking up of such words as "repeating" resulted

in an unidentifiable root which was likely to confuse rather than assist with comprehension. Another example was a word like "permission" where the beginning of the word resembles a prefix but is actually part of the root.

Finally, the students were given some general advice about how to use the strategy effectively. They could apply metacognitive strategies to any piece of reading. There were three metacognitive strategies which could be followed to the benefit of the students. Before starting to read any text, the students were told to remind themselves of the mechanics of the strategy, and also the most common prefixes and suffixes. They should also take a few minutes to work out what the text is about from such clues as the title, any sub-headings and illustrations. While reading any text the students should monitor what was happening, both the occasions when the strategy could be used quickly and effectively as well the times when it didn't work. Keeping a notebook to jot down points for later reference would pay dividends in the long run. Finally, there was a need to evaluate their progress after completing the text. Any notes taken about perceived difficulties should now be considered so as to minimize that problem in the future. Successes should also be highlighted to indicate the extent of progress with using the strategy and to increase personal confidence.

On the basis of the work done with the two students on the "Identifying Word Formation" reading strategy, certain observations could be made. Firstly, it is a strategy which can be of benefit to particular E.S.L. individuals although not all of them. The students who would gain most from such a strategy would be those who already have a reasonable reading competency but who are frustrated by the frequency with which they have to consult a dictionary or wait for the teacher to be available to assist. Such students would have a sufficiently broad vocabulary to identify and internalize common prefixes and suffixes once they had been pointed out to them. The strategy would not be of much help to those with a limited vocabulary as they would be less likely to identify them in an unfamiliar context.

Discussion of the lesson

The "Identifying Word Formation" reading strategy, as outlined above, was introduced to the students in a single fifty minute lesson. It was felt, on reflection, that this did not provide the students with sufficient time to

assimilate the strategy. It would be better to take three lessons and give the students plenty of opportunities to practise within a structured environment.

The strategy was introduced to the students individually because, as it was an experiment, there was need to monitor reactions very closely. However, the strategy would lend itself to group work. Indeed, a more positive response by the students was a likely outcome as they would have greater confidence to "bounce" ideas off each other than in a one-to-one situation. It would not be difficult to monitor individual progress with a written piece of comprehension at a later date.

Certain problems with the reading strategy quickly became apparent. The students were asked to break up the words into syllables and then begin their search for meaning with the root component. Many, many words could be approached confidently in this way but there were also many words whose roots made no sense in the context when shorn of prefixes and suffixes. Mention has already been made of the difficulties of comprehending "repeating" when following the procedure of the strategy. "Understand" is another such word. It was felt that, if the root did not appear to make any sense on its own, then one should see if the context helped to elucidate its meaning. If this failed to achieve a satisfactory result then the students should be prepared to consult a dictionary or teacher, but not with any feeling of inadequacy because English is such a complex language. To help to decrease the number of times the dictionary is required the students should create their own, personal dictionary and write in any words which cannot be comprehended satisfactorily using the reading strategy. One does this with native born English speakers when they first start school; why not use the same methods with E.S.L students!

Another area of difficulty was with words which have syllables at the beginning which appear to be discrete prefixes but in fact they are actually part of the root word. To separate them with a pencil division is to create a root with a very different root from the one intended in the context. "Permission " is one such word and "repair" is another. Once again, the personal dictionary should be used to note such exceptions to the rules.

So what does the "Identifying Word Formation" reading strategy have to offer to E.S.L students? Does it have too many exceptions to the rule to make it viable or is it more of a time waster than anything else? Despite the problems outlined above, this reading strategy is worthy of consideration for several reasons. Firstly, it provides E.S.L students with one of many tools by which they unlock the secrets of written English. When the students are using the strategy they are "having a go" themselves instead of feeling

helpless in the face of so much incomprehensible language. Secondly, they are empowering themselves to work independently of the teacher. Thirdly, they are using information about the English language which they already know and applying to what is unknown. Lastly, they are becoming familiar with the rules which govern so much of the English language. They will get results, particularly if they understand the function of "prefixes" and "suffixes". The inevitable development in personal confidence gained as their recognition of these grammatical forms increases and their reading comprehension speed improves can only be to the benefit of themselves and the overworked, harassed E.S.L teachers!

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Teaching students to communicate: An examination of the discourse forms modelled in current texts.

Livia Tigwell

Teaching Context and Curriculum Design

I chose to design a unit of work for my combined Year 9/10 group. The Year 9 students had had almost two years of German study prior to beginning this unit, and the Year 10's almost three years. The course I am using is based on the German syllabus written in 1989 by the Australian Languages Other Than English Project Team in Western Australia. Having just returned from a year's maternity leave, and with little confidence that I knew much of practical use about "where my classes were at", I felt a strong need to present a unit which was motivating and achievable, yet at the same time stimulating and challenging. The module of work I designed, titled *einen Termin machen*, aimed at teaching the language necessary to make an arrangement with someone to do something at a cerain time. The module had an oral emphasis.

The first focus in planning this module was to promote higher order thinking, as suggested by Angela Scarino at a previous LIFT course. I identified a communicative target task and designed learning tasks to act as vehicles to help the learner to develop the ability to do the target task (Mohan 1990, 138). In other words, the learning tasks act as "scaffolds", as Bruner (1983) calls them, until the learner becomes capable of performing the target task without assistance. In order to identify appropriate scaffolding learning

targets I needed to break down the target task into its subcomponents.

The target task selected for this module involved each student taking part in a telephone conversation where the main aim is to make arrangements to meet someone to do something at a mutually convenient time. I felt that in order to be able to perform this complex target task successfully the students would benefit from a curricular structure that included the following scaffolding (sub)target tasks:

1. make use of appropriate opening statements;
2. deal appropriately with wrong numbers;
3. offer/ accept / refuse an invitation, as appropriate;
4. negotiate a suitable time;
5. make excuses / give reasons for non acceptance;
6. make use of appropriate closing statements.

For the final assessment task we used the school's internal telephone network to make the calls. As the class had been informed that I expected them to conduct the conversation without notes, a colleague was present at the students' end, though not taking part in the activity, to report on the extent to which support was used. Naturally, students wishing to use notes were allowed to do so, however, credit was given to those who did not.

Materials Selection

The selection of appropriate material for the "scaffold tasks" and exercises was not difficult as fortunately, Chapter 18 of the class text *Deutsch Heute* contains the basis for quite a number of them.

This brings me to the second major planning focus for the unit. My aim was to provide the students with as much authentic material as they required to carry out the target task as naturally as possible under the circumstances. In order to determine which, if any, additional language to teach the class I had first to analyse the dialogues presented in the text and see how completely they represented the spectrum of language required for adequate performance of the target task.

Compared to other texts I have used, the range of authentic utterances provided by the authors of *Deutsch Heute* is to be commended, and served as a valuable starting point for this module. The first set of conversations depicts Sandra having trouble getting through to the right number. Initially, Sandra calls the wrong "*Müller*". The second call, also unsuccessful, is to

an unconnected number, whereupon she receives the typical recorded message, and finally, Sandra reaches the right number. The second set of dialogues also uses authentic language to present a number of scenarios for making arrangements to meet a friend. Close inspection of the conversation scripts reveals that a sufficiently rich range of material is available to serve at a model for:

- making appropriate opening statements when dealing with *wrong* numbers;
- offering and accepting an invitation;
- negotiating a suitable time;
- and making appropriate closing statements.

However, the language required for the usual openings when one has the *correct* number and for refusing an invitation and making excuses for non acceptance has not been provided in this text.

A caller simply would not open the conversation with "How would three o'clock be?" or "Will we meet tomorrow at ten?" Surely, something along the lines of "How are you? I hope I haven't caught you at a bad time / woken you up? etc would have been in order. This fact did not escape the attention of my students either, since one of the first questions put to me upon asking the class to prepare a role play calling a friend to arrange a time concerned how to make the appropriate opening.

Teaching and Evaluation

In dealing with the matter of openings I feel that a change of approach will be necessary when next I present this module, as I feel that it was inadequate to simply answer questions as they arose. Unfortunately, I fell into the trap of assuming that the students already knew sufficient suitable opening phrases. It became clear during the final assessment telephone conversation that this was not the case. I feel in hindsight that as no conversation takes place without opening phrases, these should be made explicit for all class members, not merely the minority who ask for assistance. It appears that the effort taken to brainstorm common opening phrases very early on in the module, say before any role play activities, would be more likely to pay off.

The time I spent with the class teaching the basic lexical phrases required to make excuses did, I feel, bring results. During the assessed telephone conversation the best students, who spoke without the use of notes,

were able to give reasons for not accepting the first, and sometimes even the second and third, meeting time that I suggested. This may be due, at least in part, to the fact that I presented the options in two ways, until at the end of three classes the students were beginning to feel comfortable using individual phrases without support. Firstly, I drilled the phrases, using flashcards, then I explained the basic underlying grammatical forms on the blackboard, building up a "web" of the options. Although the previous teacher had informed me that "that class *hates* grammar", I found almost the reverse to be true. In my experience the students responded positively, certainly without grumbling, and in the final analysis the results spoke for themselves.

A copy of the criteria I used when assessing this module, shown in Figure 1.

											Student
											Completion of the activit
											Intelligibility/pronunciation
											Fluency
											Range of vocabulary
											Accuracy of grammar
											Level of support required
											Use of communication strategies
											-opening
											- make an offer/ accept/ refuse
											- negotiate time
											- make excuse(s)
											- closing
											comments
											FINAL GRADE/MARK

Figure 1: Assessment critera

I aimed to collect specific data about the types of discourse forms the student was able to use. This list of criteria facilitates the provision of valuable feedback in the first instance to my students, who appear to appreciate a detailed assessment as many of them are keen to improve upon their initial performance at an assessment activity by reattempting it. Secondly, it gives me a more accurate picture of the effectiveness of my presentation of the module as a whole.

> It is certainly the case that second language learners can only learn the language that they are exposed to. However, it certainly is not the case that students learn everything they are taught or that they eventually know only what they are taught.
>
> (Lightbown and Spada: 1993:116.)

If this is indeed the case, it seems to me only logical, and in fact imperative, that language teachers begin to keep records which shed more light on the specific language and discourse forms students have mastered. In other words, if, during the natural course of our teaching, we are looking for quite specific discourse forms, and find certain ones not to be present, we are provided with important feedback which will affect our future planning and thereby improve the quality of our teaching, and hopefully, ultimately, the quality of the outcomes for our students.

This experience also highlights another issue which should be of concern to all language teachers, namely that of providing authentic models for our students. Teachers can only do this if we closely examine the texts we draw on. Careful scrutiny of an alternate text *Feuerwerk*, published in '95, reveals a higher level of care in presenting the full range of discourse forms for its dialogues. However, I believe there is still merit in continuing to use a text such as *Deutsch Heute* which omits certain discourse forms from its sample dialogues *as long as the teacher recognises this and plans accordingly.* If we do model all of the discourse forms required for the situations we are teaching, whether our text includes them or not, we are exposing our students to a richer, more authentic version of the target language, and this I believe needs to be our aim if we are serious about preparing our students to communicate confidently.

Appendix 1

Telephone Conversation: Openings: wrong number

First Part: Why not give someone a ring?

Müller

Is Sandra there, please?

Who, please?

Sandra.

There's no Sandra here.
You must have the wrong number.

Oh, sorry. Goodbye.

That was the wrong Müller.

She hangs up and looks up the number again.

0 3 4 8 9 3 4.

This number is not connected. Please check the number and try again. This number is not ...

Oh, dear, wrong number again. What's up with me?

She dials for a third time.

Müller

Hello. It's Sandra.

Sandra! How's things?
You're back in the country?
Yes. I'm fine.
How are you all?

Great!

Is Martin there, please?

Yes, sure. I'll get him...MARTIN!! Sandra on the phone. Just a minute, Sandra....Here he comes.

Second Part: When shall we meet?

1. Sandra telephones Martin. She calls him form the first telephone booth. They agree to meet at two o'clock.

How would three o'clock suit?

No, that wouldn't work.

A little earlier? Say, at two?

Yes, that's fine.

O.K.. Then we'll meet
tomorrow at two.

Yes. Great. Till then. Cheerio.

Cheerio.

2. Manfred is calling his girlfriend Heidrun in the second telephone booth.

When will we meet then?

How would tomorrow at ten be?

No. Unfortunately that doesn't
suit. Can you come a bit earlier?

Yes, sure, at nine?

Yes, that's fine.

Good, till nine at your place.
Cheerio.

Cheerio.

3. Ralf Schneider is in the third phone booth. He is calling Mrs Auler. They want to arrange a time to meet.

When can we see each other?
Have you got time tomorrow?

Yes, after three.

Good then we can meet at
half past three at your office?

Yes, no problem.
See you tomorrow.

Great. Till tomorrow,
Mrs Auler. Goodbye.

Goodbye.

4. In the forth telephone booth Bettina is calling her friend Dieter.

Can we see each other
tomorrow at half past nine?

No, that's too early for me.

When have you got time?

Between eleven and one.

Then we can meet at half
past eleven?

Yes, fine, where then?

At Ruth's Cafe?

O.K.. Fine. Till then, bye.

Bye.